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Fernando Ortiz and the Transatlantic Exchange Network

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Fernando Ortiz´s pioneering work established the foundations for the study of the black population in Cuba, above all in the field of history and culture.

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Fernando Ortiz

Without a shadow of a doubt, Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) was the most important Cuban intellectual of the twentieth century, whether due to his research on interethnic relations or his activities as a public personality. His pioneering work established the foundations for the study of the black population in Cuba, above all in the field of history and culture. To explain the complex junction of different peoples of the world in Cuban territory, in the book *Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* Ortiz created the concept of 'transculturation', whose original formulation established his international reputation.

Coming from a prosperous family of European origin, Ortiz spent his childhood and youth in two worlds, his native Cuba and the Spain of his relatives. At the age of one he was brought by his mother to Minorca, where he grew up speaking *Lemosín*, the dialect of an intercultural place *par excellence* due to the intersection of people and civilizations of the Mediterranean. He precociously showed his ethnographic vocation by publishing there his first book, *Principi i Prostes* (Entrées and Desserts), about the local folklore and *Costumbrista* literature. [1]

At the age of fourteen he returned to the Americas to study law in the University of Havana at the beginning of the Cuban war of independence (1895-1898), returning to Spain at the end of the conflict to conclude his degree in the University of Barcelona. Following this, during his doctorate in law in the University of Madrid (in the area of criminology) he came into contact with the question to which he would devote his studies - deciphering the enigma of the role of blacks in Cuban history. His return to Cuba in 1902 coincided with the end of US military intervention and the establishment of the first elected Cuban government. He then studied for a second doctorate in the University of Havana and afterwards left for Europe, where he worked as consul of the diplomatic service in La Coruña, Genoa, and Marseilles, and

finally as secretary of the legation in Paris. This period allowed him not only to divide his professional obligations with his research, but also to expand his academic contacts and personal relations, such as the friendship with two exponents of Italian criminology, Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri.

Settling definitely in Cuba in 1905, he worked as a lawyer in the *Audiencia de la Habana* (the Cuban Supreme Court), and afterwards as a professor of law in the university of the same city, becoming a prominent figure in academic, political, and cultural circles. Both his innovative production on blacks and his numerous activities in relation to the culture, education, democracy, social equality, and political sovereignty of Cuba explain his projection as an intellectual inside and outside the island. He reactivated the centenarian *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, presided the prestigious *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* (SEAP), was a deputy for the Liberal Party, represented the country in international meetings, wrote assiduously in the press, founded numerous publications and entities dedicated to science and culture, and intervened in public life, even after abandoning politics in 1927.

#Afro-Cuban Studies

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with around a million and a half inhabitants, Cuba was a country which had recently gained independence from Spain and was under the guardianship of the United States. The agri-exporting economic base had molded the social structure of the island, composed of a majority of European origin who formed two thirds of the population, and a third of Afro-descendants whose ancestors had been slaves, as well as one percent of Chinese origin. Despite the active participation of Afro-descendants in Cuba's independence process, this segment of the population remained poor and subjected to prejudice and racial discrimination. Afraid of the Africanization of the country, Cuban authorities restricted the entrance of black workers coming from the Caribbean at the same time that they stimulated European immigration, especially Spaniards from the Iberian Peninsula and the Canaries.

Forming the poorest part of the population, Afro-descendants were the target of prejudice from whites, both due to their cultural and religious traditions and for being associated with criminal practices. More than this, the colored population represented a factor which called into question their own national identity, conceived as essentially white and Hispanic by ruling groups. It was in this context of racial division that Fernando Ortiz began his studies about the colored population.

In 1906, Ortiz published in Madrid *Los negros brujos*, self-defined as a study of criminal ethnology and the first book of a collection entitled *Hampa afrocubana*. With a elegizing preface by Cesare Lombroso, the study sought to describe the human types of the so-called Cuban '*mala vida*' - a bad or criminal life - and to unveil the psychic factors which inclined the black community towards crime and anti-social practices. Based on positivist and racialist concepts of criminal anthropology of the time, blacks were treated as inferior in moral, psychic, and intellectual terms, a condition reflected in a set of deficiencies: in religion, habits, language, arts, and sexual and family relations. The work also conceived black groups as victims of an inherited ancestral primitivism - the so-called atavism - from which they could not free themselves. He researched and connected the African, Iberian, and Cuban roots of the behavior of blacks, especially witches, *curros* (the name given to delinquents) and *ñañiguismo* or *Abakuá* - a criminal secret society of an African origin. By identifying the evils which afflicted Cuban society, Ortiz intended to contribute to the regeneration of the social fabric and the moral progress of the nation, to be achieved through governmental policies. One of his references was the Brazilian doctor Nina Rodrigues, whose studies aimed to explain the behavior of blacks in Brazil through fetishism and atavism.

In the following years Ortiz became the principal authority on Afro-descendants in Latin America by promoting pioneering investigations which allied the examination of original themes to a surprising erudition and scientific prowess. In theoretical terms - but not without ambiguities - he abandoned evolutionist positivism and biological determinism in favor of the cultural perspective developed under the ambit of US anthropology, especially by Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits, and Bronislaw Malinowski. In the following two decades he published numerous papers, of which the following are most important: *Las rebeliones de los afrocubanos* (1910), *Hampa afrocubana: los negros esclavos* (1916), *La fiesta afrocubana del Dia de Reyes* (1920), *Los cabildos afrocubanos* (1921), *Historia de la arqueologia indocubana* (1922), *Un catauro de cubanismo, apuntes lexicográficos* (1923), and *Glosario de afronegrismos* (1924). These studies were based on unpublished primary sources and a vast international bibliography, in order to reconstruct the web which united the history of the island to other places in the world.

The adoption of the cultural paradigm by Ortiz led to the abandonment of the thesis of biological, psychic, and cultural inferiority of Afro-Cubans. The history of slaves and the free colored population stopped being treated negatively and came to be considered in terms of its cultural, economic, and social contribution to the construction of the nation. A step in this direction was taken with the creation of *Sociedad del Folklore Cubano* and the journal *Archivos del Folklore* in 1924, under the auspices of SEAP. In the following decade a new impulse was given with the creation of *Sociedad de Estúdios Afrocubanos* in 1937. Presided by Ortiz, it had the mission of studying the various phenomena produced during the history of Cuba by the coexistence of different ethnic groups in order to explain their causes, facts, and consequences, as well as stimulating Cuban national integration.

His research about the black population materialized in the form of papers published in the 1950s, which constituted a monumental work for the understanding of Cuban cultural manifestations. The first two books were entitled *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* and *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*. He used a wide range of sources, such as reports of travelers and missionaries, studies by anthropologists, ethnographers, and musicologists, pentagrams, drawings, and photographs, as well as direct observations made by Ortiz himself, in order to document the African and Afro-Cuban contributions to folklore. The other books formed a treatise with five volumes on the ethnographic study of music, with the title *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*. Divided according to their sound characteristics, the instruments were meticulously examined both in terms of their African roots, European influences, and Cuban recreations, and their multiple uses in the past and present.

How to understand Cuban folkloric music? It was essentially a manifestation of black groups of Cuban society: "the music characteristic of the basic *stratum* of a given society," through their own creation or the adaptation of others and incorporated into custom. [2] His judgment of the sociability of African and Afro-Cuban breaks away from common sense view which confuses this with disorder, ignorance, and irrationality. Defining it as democratic and communitarian - together with singing, dance, and pantomime - it was more than an element of distraction typical of the music of whites. Based on anthropology and his observations, he attributed it an essential function for the maintenance of the collectivity: "it is music for work and collective pleasures, for economic production and distribution, for the government and war, for the temple and magic, for the family and school, for love and death." [3] In summary, music and the other Afro-Cuban cultural expressions were structuring elements of the social organization of the black community.

According to Ortiz, a few years previously it had been scandalous to recognize the positive contribution of black culture for the formation of Cuban nationality, but times had changed, offering an opening to the understanding of this fact. In his overview of Afro-Cuban folklore, he saw an original art with positive human and aesthetic contributions capable of being transformed into universal art. Looking at the future with optimism, Ortiz believed that a revolution was underway in the world which could result in the interpenetration of all the musical values of peoples in the form of a progressive *panmixia* of arts, colors, and cultures. As he stated: "*Mulatez* goes more further beyond the crossing of pigments, it reaches the mixing of ideas, emotions, arts, and customs." [4]

#Transculturation

The concept of transculturation is central to the Fernando Ortiz's best known work, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, whose amplitude of objectives was suggested by the subtitle *Advertencia de sus contrastes agrários, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografia y su transculturación*. In the introduction to the first edition, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski mentioned meeting Ortiz in Havana in 1929, when Cuban author said he was preparing a book with a new technical vocabulary to replace various current expressions - cultural change, acculturation, diffusion, migration, or the osmosis of cultures - which he considered imperfect. The neologism was enthusiastically welcomed by Malinowski, who wrote a text about the concept of transculturation as an introduction to the book. This praise by one of the most renowned anthropologists of the time certainly contributed to the positive academic fortune of the Cuban scholar's new formulation.

Ortiz aimed to overcome the limits of the concept of acculturation then current in Anglo-Saxon anthropology, since it conceived change in a single direction, in other words as the cultural acquisition of a different culture, a process in which a less powerful culture is assimilated by a more powerful one. On the other hand, the Cuban understood that the loss of a culture was a phenomenon of partial *deculturation* of the various parts involved, as well as the mixing resulting from contact generated a new phenomenon, *neoculturation*. In summary, the result of the contact of one or more cultures was not a univocal process, but an interaction which gave rise to something unprecedented and different from the original elements at play.

"The true history of Cuba is the history of its intricate transculturations." In this polished phrase, Ortiz synthesized the scope of the book: explaining the varied and incessant phenomena of the transmigration of peoples and the transmutation of cultures, a necessary task to understand the various aspects of Cuban society - economic, institutional, ethnical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, and sexual. The historical process of the island is characterized in the book as an incessant current of immigrants - due to their own will or strength - always banished by the loss of their original cultural references and in conflict with the conditions of the society receiving them. It is a violent drama, an epic involving all the historical characters, since in his words, "above or below, all divided the same environment of terror and force: the oppressed terror of punishment, the oppressor's terror of revenge; all in the painful process of transculturation towards a new cultural environment." The book further demonstrates that the human components participating in this process could not be merely reduced to three generic entities, such as Indians, whites, and blacks, since these categories are subdivided into a myriad of ethnic and cultural subgroups coming from the Americas, the Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa, continental Europe, Great Britain, and even the Far East. [5]

The two principal economic activities, the production of tobacco and sugar, are analyzed in terms of techniques, labor, and commercialization, and as forming two contrasting and at the same time parallel universes. Native tobacco is associated with free labor, small landholdings, autonomy, and freedom. However, sugar, a foreign product, is associated with slavery, plantations, absenteeism, oppression, mass production, and international capitalism. Using a historical argument, Ortiz demonstrates how the production of tobacco and sugar for export molded Cuban society in a unique manner, interconnecting it with the rest of the world through a flow of exchanges which affected both Cuba and the various peoples who had some contact with the island. Production for exports had produced the radical change in demographic composition and the forms of working in Cuba, as well as the formation of new habits and cultural expressions resulting from the interaction of populations of a European, African, and American origin. On the other hand, the world diffusion of Cuban sugar and tobacco propelled nascent capitalism and introduced new consumption habits. For example, tobacco acquired different uses and meanings overseas. Transformed into a mercantile good, the collective and religious function performed by tobacco among indigenous people was abandoned by Europeans, gaining a preponderantly ludic and individual use. Its consumption was condemned by the Catholic Church and the Inquisition, which associated it with the heretical rituals of Indians, though it found arduous defenders among poets, philosophers, and merchants, who ultimately won the quarrel and contributed to the diffusion of its mass consumption.

Unlike the majority of other works that deal with cultural aspects of blacks, *Contrapunteo* stands out because of its broad-ranging perspective in treating transculturation as a total fact which linked the history of inter-ethnic relations to economic, political, social, and cultural, phenomena. The vitality of this approach resides in its treatment of phenomena derived from the cultural contact of different peoples without the limitations imposed by ethnocentrism and the teleological perspective. The concept gained greater strength the greater its criticism of colonialism, imperialism, and the homogenized models diffused by developed countries after the Second World War. It was especially used by Mexican scholar Mariano Picón-Salas in a classic work about the cultural history of colonial Hispano-American, published in 1944, dealing with the phenomenon of fusion of indigenous and European elements which led to the creation of *mestizo* art.

Despite being internationally recognized by specialists from various fields, the concept of transculturation was not adequately valued in Anglo-Saxon social science, which instead privileged the concept of acculturation and syncretism. [6] Nevertheless, his contribution was acclaimed by a series of international specialists. In recognition of his work, Fernando Ortiz received the title of *Doutor Honoris Causa* from Columbia University in the commemoration of its bicentenary in 1954. For US anthropologist Sidney Mintz, Ortiz was the dean of Afro-American studies since he anticipated US anthropologists in this type of studies; while according to the French ethnologist Roger Bastide, the Cuban was not only the pioneer, but the 'master.'

The innovative notion of transculturation was relegated to a second level in the academic world for much time until it reappeared in strength. In 1982, Angel Rama published the book *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*; in 1990, the Mexican author Néstor García Canclini proposed the expression 'hybrid cultures' to analyze the Latin American multicultural dynamic; and in 1992 the American scholar Mary Louise Pratt analyzed the phenomena of transculturation in what she called 'contact zones,' social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and intertwine with each other. In recent years, with the advance of globalization, the notion of transculturation has been a fertile source of inspiration for historical, anthropological, and international cultural studies. In the case of Latin America, the theory contained in the concept of transculturation, that its history is fruit of a complex intersection of populations, ideas,

religions, and customs coming from various parts of the world, has broadened academic paradigms by pointing to the role of transnational factors in what are conventionally defined as national histories and cultures.

#Exchanges

Fernando Ortiz was noted for his initiatives in the promotion of academic knowledge and cultural diffusion, which aided the formation of a transatlantic network of exchange under his coordination. His experience in Europe during his youth contributed to his construction of a cosmopolitan vision of the world and a set of intellectual and professional relations which accompanied him throughout his trajectory. Imbued with a modernizing spirit, he lamented the scenario of isolation and backwardness of Europe in relation to the United States. Overcoming the 'tropical slump' and the colonial inheritance depended on the strengthening of ties of Cuba with the more advanced nations in order to bring it up to date with the conquests of the various fields of technology, culture, and science.

His performance was fundamental for the promotion of the cultural and scientific relations of Cuba, Spain, and the United States. In 1926, Ortiz assumed the presidency of the *Institución Hispano Cubana de Cultura*, founded with the support of businessmen and important people from the island's cultural and intellectual landscape. Also known as *Hispanocubana*, the entity joined others existing in Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay, with the aim of improving relations in the Hispano-American sphere through the exchange of men of science, artists, and students, as well as the maintenance of university chairs and cultural diffusion. The initiative represented an attempt to resist the pressures of US influence on Cuba through the valuation of historic ties and common interests between the island, Spain, and Latin American countries.

Despite his family and academic ties with Spain, Ortiz repudiated the Pan-Hispanist movement due to its propaganda about the imperial past and its tutelary rhetoric in relation to the former American possessions. However, he admired the progressive and modernizing forces of Spanish society, with whom the Cubans could make commitments related to knowledge, art, and work. Behind this initiative was a 'regenerationist' inspiration which evoked the intellectual movement of the same name formed in Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, whose reformist spirit Ortiz believed could collaborate for the progress of the Cuban nation.

A series of academic exchange actions were organized by *Hispanocubana* and *Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios* (JAE). Created in 1907 by the Spanish government and presided by the Nobel award winner in medicine Santiago Ramón y Cajal, JAE was concerned with the formation of scientists and intellectuals through the international exchange of professors and grants for students. Ortiz organized a broad network linking various institutions in the Americas, in order to allow the circulation of professors in various countries. Thanks to this project, a series of Spanish scientists, writers, and artists became part of this academic network, traveling not only around the Caribbean and Latin America, but also to the United States. For example, joint activities were carried out with the Hispanic Institute of Columbia University, the University of Porto Rico, and the *Institución Hispano Mexicana de Intercambio Universitário*. In this first phase of *Hispanocubana* numerous names of Spanish science and culture participated in the activities under its patronage, such as Federico Garcia Lorca, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Claudio Sanchez Albornoz, Fernando de los Rios, Maria de Maeztu, Luis de Zulueta, Gregorio Marañon, Luis Araquistain, Américo Castro, Blas Carreras, Gustavo Pittaluga, Fabra Rivas, and José Casares Gil, amongst many others. Two publications were also created to divulge the activities of the institution: *Mensajes de la Institución Hispanocubana de Cultura* (1928-1931) and *Surco* (1930-1931).

Ortiz's participation in a series of international academic events was another dimension of his activity aimed at the exchange of scientific knowledge, the construction of intellectual networks, and the defense of progressive positions. In 1922, he went to the Congress of Americanists in Rome; in 1928, he was part of the Cuban delegation to the Sixth Pan-American Conference, on which occasion Ortiz was involved in the creation of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History; in 1930, he participated in the *American Historical Association* Congress in Boston; in 1943, he represented his country in the First Inter-American Demographic Congress, held in Mexico; in 1945, he participated in the International Archaeological Congress of the Caribbean; in 1949, he went to the Interamerican Indigenist Congress in Cuzco; in 1952, to the Congress of Americanists in Oxford, and to that of Anthropology and Ethnology in Vienna.

In 1954, Ortiz participated in Brazil in two events held as part of the commemorations of the Fourth Centenary of the foundation of the city of São Paulo. One of them was the First International Congress of Folklore and Education, which he also presided and passed a recommendation to governments and universities to support initiatives for the preservation, research, and teaching about manifestation of popular culture. The other was the XXXI International Congress of Americanists, under the presidency of honor of the Brazilian *sertanista* General Cândido Rondon, which involved representatives from 35 countries, with Ortiz holding one of the vice-presidencies and coordinating the Afro-American Studies session. [7]

#International Solidarity

Hispanocubana's activities were interrupted by the upheavals of the political life on the island, shaken by the dictatorship imposed by President Gerardo Machado, which drove Fernando Ortiz into self-exile in the United States in 1931. Residing in Washington, he acted as the ambassador of the anti-*Machadista* opposition until the latter's fall in 1933. Having overcome the dictatorship, the renewal of *Hispanocubana*'s activities were marked by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The event had intense repercussions in Cuba due to the enormous colony of Spanish immigrants and divided public opinion in relation to the two warring groups, the republicans and the nationalist rebels. Solidarity committees were organized to send material and financial help to the republicans and around a thousand volunteers left to join the International Brigades against the rebels.

Under the direction of Ortiz, *Hispanocubana* was transformed into a center of support for Spanish exiles working in connection with other Latin American, North American, and European institutions. The settling of exiles in Cuba faced difficulties due to its reduced labor market and restrictive labor legislation for foreigners, obliging part of the exiles to look for better conditions in other countries in the Americas. For these reasons, Cuban solidarity institutions were essential. They formed a reception network which supported exiles with grants and subventions to hold academic activities such as conferences and research in cultural institutions and universities. Connections were maintained with Mexico, where a teaching and research institution was created by the Lázaro Cárdenas administration to welcome the exiles, *Casa de España,* later being changed to the current *Colegio de México*. To disseminate the activities of *Hispanocubana*, Ortiz once again created a journal to publicize the organization's actions, *Ultra* (1936-1947), containing the abstracts of congresses, book summaries, scientific novelties, and Cuban cultural activities, since for Ortiz "being educated was the only way to be free." [8]

Most of the exiles had degrees and were composed of professionals, university teaching staff and researchers, artists, intellectuals, and journalists. To support them *Hispanocubana* held various activities, such as the creation of *Escuela Hispanocubana Libre de La Habana* and conference cycles, in which

participated three hundred speakers between 1936 and 1947. Over time the exiles became integrated as professionals and in the universities, performing a very important role in the development of scientific areas still incipient in Cuba such as medicine, such as Gustavo Pittaluga, a renowned researcher of hematology and tropical diseases who settled permanently in the island. As president of the *Unión de Profesores Universitarios Españoles Emigrados*, an entity previously based in Paris and aimed at bringing together teaching staff scattered among various countries, Pittaluga presided over its first meeting in 1943. Aimed at discussing the problems of the Spanish reality and proposing ideas to reconstruct democratic Spain, a document was written at the end of the event, *Declaración de La Habana*, which ratified the role of Cuba as place of international resistance to the Francoist dictatorship.

From an old overseas province, a mere supplier of tobacco and sugar, Cuba was converted into one of the principal places of pilgrimage for the exiles from the Spanish hecatomb. An overseas space where they could find political and material support, intellectual ties, and friendship to restart their lives.

#The fight again racism

Criticism of the notion of race and anti-racist initiatives made Ortiz one of the pioneers in this field of Latin America. His first criticisms appeared in 1910 in the controversy with Pan-Hispanism in his questioning of the existence of a 'Hispanic race,' under the argument that a race was not a biologically consistent concept, but rather an intellectual artifact.

Later, his studies and public manifestations about the conditions of blacks only reinforced his anti-racist arguments and his protagonism in favor of the equality of humans. In 1929, in a tribute received in Madrid, he made a speech condemning not only the thesis of the Hispanic race, but also as the entire concept of race, stating its false, static, and dissociating nature, in contrast with the notion of culture, defined as dynamic, universal, and capable of aggregating peoples.

In the 1930s, the creation of *Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos* contributed not only to the study of blacks, but also to formulate proposals for their integration. As a result, the 1940 Cuban Constitution came to declare illegal and subject to punishment all discrimination due to sex, race, color, or class. The same year a resolution was passed by the VIII Pan-American Scientific Congress, held in Washington, at the suggestion of Fernando Ortiz, present as a Cuban delegate, declaring that anthropology denied scientific support for discrimination against any social, linguistic, religious, or political group, under the pretext of being a racially inferior group.

In turn, in the First Interamerican Demographic Congress his proposal to banish the vocabulary race from official governmental documents was accepted. To increase the study of Afro-American populations and the defense of ethnical equality the *International Institute of Afro-American Studies* was also created. With a head office in Mexico and under the direction of Fernando Ortiz, various well known scientists from various American countries participated in it. These decisions in favor of equality had a repercussion in the conference for the creation of the United Nations in 1945, which among other objectives sought to stimulate respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms for all, without distinction of race, gender, language, or religion.

The most systematic work of criticism of racism came to light in 1946 with the publication of *El engaño de las razas*. Written in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the denunciation of the Holocaust, the book represented a response to the deleterious effects of the notion of race for the welfare of humanity. It was a manifesto in defense of human equality in which Ortiz refuted arguments of racial theories with a biological, psychological, and anthropological base, showing that they were fruits of

contemporary racism at the service of the oppression of determined groups and interests. Affirming the universal nature of miscegenation, he showed that it was essential for the understanding of the history of a set of American countries in terms of their ethnic components and their reciprocal transculturation. The work consisted both of a criticism of the supposed scientific foundation of the concept of race and an ethical and moral defense of the universal dimension of the human being. Its vehement condemnation of racism and the defense of what he called the 'de-racialization of humanity' gave the book a place of international prominence in a historical context in which racial prejudice found legal support in various parts of the world. Not by chance the book was praised by sectors which combatted racism in the United States, highlighting the solidity of its arguments and its contribution to overcoming the scourge of hatred and racial segregation.

#Legacy

Fernando Ortiz's life and work left an invaluable legacy both for the comprehension of American societies and the defense of human equality and political liberty. Cosmopolitan by vocation he was responsible for initiatives aimed at the reciprocal knowledge of different ethnic groups, international solidarity, and the exchange of experiences among people from various nationalities, having as an aspiration harmony and integration. As a journalist and intellectual he rebelled against racism, neocolonialism, and submission to imported mental schemes. Through the numerous entities and journals he created and directed, Ortiz intervened in favor of the development of citizenship, education, science, and culture.

Having begun his research on racialist premises inherited from the European intellectual environment, he knew how to evolve towards a critical approach which became a reference for studies of American ethno-racial phenomena. Through research about the history, habits, and culture of blacks he contributed to show their role as one of the pillars of society of their country and its national identity, which he called *cubanidad* (Cubaness).

The study of blacks and Cuban cultural roots resulted in the formulation of a new perspective synthesized in the concept of transculturation. Ortiz understood that Cuban historic phenomena could not be adequately understood within the limits of the national state, since over time the island had been peopled by European, African, and Asiatic migratory flows, which had amalgamated and formed a new society. Rather than an exclusively Cuban phenomenon, he saw fusions and miscegenation as a mark of all American societies: of bodies, ideas, and products; of languages, customs, and cultures; of values, vices, and passions. In preparing the concept of transculturation and materializing it in a set of works, Ortiz was a precursor of *Atlantic History,* [9] since the cultural, political, economic, and social phenomena had to be studied in concrete connections which united the historic process of peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Europe.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to state that transculturation has become confused with Ortiz's own biography, a Cuban with Spanish roots who experienced with intensity the intersection of Atlantic cultures.

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