Tanya L. Saunders, *Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. x + 356 pp. (Paper US\$ 29.95)

Cuban Underground Hip Hop delivers an intimate history of hip hop in Cuba between 1996 and 2006. Tanya Saunders combines field notes, interviews, and theoretical analysis, with the aim of unraveling the complex connections between revolution, race, gender, class, and music in Cuba. Indeed, as she demonstrates, the members of the Cuban Underground Hip Hop Movement (CUHHM) greatly contributed to pushing the Revolution beyond its own limitations and to some extent completing it. While other monographs such as Geoffrey Baker's *Buena Vista in the Club* or Marc Perry's *Negro Soy Yo* explore similar topics, *Cuban Underground Hip Hop* stands out because of its focus on the intersectionality of race and gender.

Saunders astutely underlines how the expression of both was obstructed and monopolized by the government. In fact, since the Haitian Revolution, Blackness has been deemed potentially dangerous and, over time, the Cuban nationalistic project embraced *mestizaje*, "an ideology of a raceless Cuba," when in practice "this vision still retained whiteness as an unquestioned ideal and put the power to define Cuban national culture firmly in the hands of the white and light-skinned Cuban elite" (pp. 48–49). Similarly, the Revolution enshrined the image of the female revolutionary as a light-skinned woman who is simultaneously a mother and a worker, always defined as "dependent upon her sexual relationship to men" (p. 200). Women at large "are often excluded from the public sphere" while black women are marginalized and lesbians are represented as a disgusting "source of violent anxiety" (p. 55), making it rather challenging to identify as a black lesbian, a feminist, or both. In many ways, to be revolutionary often means to neither claim one's Blackness nor assert one's feminism, leaving many in a quandary, unable to even express the source of their distress.

Building on a tradition of radical music such as Nova Tropa in the 1960s, the CUHHM established itself as a medium of social critique and placed black consciousness front and center. Saunders carefully notes that U.S. influence is not unidirectional and that the Cuban hip hop scene developed its own themes in response, with, for instance, references to indigenous people, the figure of the maroon, and the orishas; this is one key intervention of Cuban hip hop, as it provides Blacks with the tools to challenge colorism, the State's raceless discourse, and the commercialization of music. Yet the artists navigate a narrow corridor where access to economic resources is largely demarcated by race and gender.

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The liberalization of the economy during the Special Period only reinforced economic and racial disparities, and hip hop functioned as “a Black public sphere” (p. 163), where the marginalized could voice their concerns. Despite multiple attempts at coopting the hip hop scene, the government was never able to fully control it. CUHHM artists refer to themselves as activists and although their artistic production is central to their activism, they also organize educational neighborhood-based events that generate a sense of community and defy powerlessness. One of the strengths of Saunders’s book is her connections with the CUHHM; as she exposes the obstacles faced by artists in general and female hip hop artists in particular, she shares numerous experiences and takes her readers right into the artist’s personal space. She also underlines the specific role of the CUHHM artists, who are too often erased from the larger hip hop scene. Presenting Magia MC, one of the first hip hop female artists to claim an Afrocentric identity and the first hip hop artist to direct the official Cuban Agency of Rap, Saunders reminds us that Magia also distanced herself from her initial image as a feminist, perceived as too aggressive. Of particular interest is Las Krudas CUBENSI, a group of three openly lesbian women to whom Saunders dedicates an entire chapter. Despite initial opposition to their message, the group has been able to establish itself as one of CUHHM’s pillars. Although well versed in feminist literature, they insist that they were in fact introduced to feminism through the daily experiences of their mothers. This is an important point of the book as Saunders articulates the originality of Cuban hip hop. If connections with the United States and the rest of the world are obviously important, they remain difficult. Saunders describes the constraints of the hip hop artist in a musical genre that relies heavily on access to technology and knowledge of English, and she painstakingly describes the CUHHM as a movement whose original forms of expression are specifically rooted in the modalities of life in Cuba. And while censorship and a desire to broaden their horizons have led many CUHHM participants to emigrate, their impact on the Cuban artistic scene remains strong.

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