

## Rap Cubano

by Maria Diana Fulger

Cuban rap emerged within the framework of global cultural flows between the United States and Cuba, and reflects the dialogue between Afro-Cuban traditions and a Diasporic African culture in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Developing in the early 90s as a response to the ideological and economic crisis Cuba was facing during the so-called Special Period (*periodo especial*), Cuban rap found inspiration with the hip hop culture in the United States.<sup>2,3</sup> It grew under the influence of U.S.-American radio stations such as 99 Jams and 1040 am, which played R&B and hip hop, and was fueled by the belief that rap music is black music reflecting the problematic issues of people of color (cf. Jacobs-Fantauzzi).<sup>4</sup> For U.S.-American rap the racial component played a decisive role, as it served as a basis for redefining black identity and consolidating an African-American consciousness. Similar to the development of U.S.-American rap in the 1970s as protest music, Cuban rap rooted its message in the political disappointment, social inequalities and racial discrimination that the Cuban society struggled with. Cuban rappers assumed the responsibility to denounce the social and racial injustice which resurfaced in Cuba during the Special Period, and criticize the government's failure to acknowledge the persistence of class and racial divisions in the social sphere. As Roberto Zurbano claims, Cubans see rap as a possibility of expression and of identification at a global level with the black Diaspora, as part of a transnational, Diasporic, decolonizing and emancipating conscience.<sup>5</sup> Artists such as Anónimo Consejo and EPG&B, or Junior Clan, subscribed their music to a globally encompassing African culture which throughout centuries bore its children in Cuba, as well.<sup>6</sup> However, if the first generation of Cuban rappers leaned more towards their U.S.-American peers, with further generations (Orishas, Los Aldeanos, etc.), artists developed their own style, by incorporating Afro-Cuban beats and rhythms, and local themes.<sup>7</sup> Thus, there is a double function to Cuban rap: to raise awareness to the dynamics of race and social injustice in Cuba, while also transgressing national borders, by giving voice to the African Diasporic experience and cultural identities.

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<sup>1</sup> For global cultural flows see Appadurai 33-36.

<sup>2</sup> During the decade of the 90s Cuba went into a severe economic depression, euphemistically called 'The Special Period in Times of Peace', caused by the fall of the Soviet Block; Fernández, Nadine 25; Fuente 19.

<sup>3</sup> See Fernández, Ariel 7.

<sup>4</sup> The author elaborates on this matter in Fernández, Ariel 5.

<sup>5</sup> Zurbano 22.

<sup>6</sup> Cuban rapper Alexis in Jacobs-Fantauzzi.

<sup>7</sup> Testifying to the local adaptation of music and style, see Fernández, Ariel 5, 6.

## Works Cited

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