Negro Soy Yo: Hip Hop and Raced Citizenship in Neoliberal Cuba.
By Marc D. Perry. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2015. 284 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5885-5
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Music makes an excellent domain in which to observe processes of cultural hegemony and appropriation and it is always satisfying in this respect when the state seems to present a coherent front in relation to which 'resistance' can be identified. The revolutionary Cuban state fits this bill very nicely and Marc Perry's exploration of the relationships between Cuban hip hop and the government, mediated by a network of transnational relations in which the United States figures quite large, makes for a very enjoyable read. The theoretical frame is familiar, based on Gramscian-influenced cultural studies, à la Stuart Hall, channelling this, first, through ideas about neoliberalisation and its tendencies to marketise everything and associate citizenship with entrepreneurialism, thus generating exclusion of people and things seen as less marketable or entrepreneurial; and, second, through an Afro-diasporic sensibility that highlights interactions across national spaces that connect diverse instances of culture, self and collectivity identified as black.

Perry has two main themes. First, Cuban hip hop was decisively black on its own terms, no matter how much it was influenced by US hip hop. He takes issue with Geoffrey Baker, who argues that the blackness of Cuban hip hop and its overt engagement with questions of racism were mainly an import, brought over by US artists and certain North American scholars, among whom Perry was included by Baker or includes himself – whether because he is North American or black is not clear (p. 17). Perry says that Afro-Cuban hip hop had its own Afro roots in the island: granted these roots were partly formed in dialogue with US 1960s' soul and R&B, but they were nurtured too through Cuba's links to Angola, although detail on this is limited to two examples; and through relations between musical practice and Afro-Cuban religion, and here there are richer data, although at one point this relation is parsed as one between the public and the 'more private' (p. 61), a division which Perry's own data show is not very robust, given the public character of much religious practice. Perry's second contention follows from the first: he argues that Afro-Cuban hip hop was decisively shaped by transnational exchanges. These two themes are woven through the story of the rise, short-lived institutionalisation and decline of Afro-Cuban hip hop.

Perry explores the relationship between hip hop and revolutionary socialist ideals, showing how the process of becoming self-consciously, politically 'black' was for some early rappers and DJs strongly linked to revolutionary ideologies of social justice and equality; earlier US black nationalism fitted right in here, as it also had a radical and revolutionary bent. Thus the rap duo Obsesión, made up of Magia López and Alexey Rodríguez, while they had a strong critique of racism in Cuba and thus a critique of the Cuban state (e.g. insofar as police harassment of Afro-Cubans has been a recurrent theme in hip hop), and while they embodied their blackness through hair styles and clothing, also saw their struggle as a socialist one.

A key quandary for Afro-Latin Americans has always been about cross-cutting identifications in national *vs.* racial terms. From the late nineteenth century, Afro-Cubans have wanted to be equal citizens, but have been excluded on racial grounds, forcing them to identify and organise as black Cubans. Being equally

Afro *and* Cuban has been an elusive possibility. Perry shows how the terms of this debate are now partly generational, with older Afro-Cubans giving more weight to the national, while younger ones tend more towards a black sense of self, albeit a Cubanised version of it, tinged for example with Afro-Cuban religious practices. For some this sense of self is fed by various informal pedagogical spaces, such as those led by a female African American political exile, with Afrocentric leanings, and by a gay Afro-Cuban scholar interested in recovering the historical agency of Afro-Cubans. Perry explores the gendered dimensions of this black sense of self, tracing the masculinist tendencies of the hip hop scene (which are low-key compared with those of the reggaetón and timba scenes), and the reaction from black female hip hop artists, and how they juggle the intersecting axes of race, gender and sexuality, in ways that will be familiar to readers acquainted with literature on intersectionality.

The relation between hip hop and the state has been fast-changing. Initially suspicious of its blackness and its contestatory stance, state cultural agencies soon accepted it in conditional fashion as a legitimate expression of 'the people' and of socialist ideas; they began to fund it and institutionalise it, creating tensions between autonomy and co-optation. After the Special Period, as the economy opened up to the market, these state agencies also saw hip hop as a potential money-spinner. Throughout, however, the agencies were less keen on the critique of racism, so rap was a key element in an emerging black public counterculture, in which intellectuals and artists also participated. Within a few years, the interest of the state began to wane and shift towards reggaetón, which was apparently identified as having more commercial potential and, despite its sexism and materialism, was seen as less overtly contestatory, especially in terms of anti-racism. Meanwhile, many key Afro-Cuban hip hop artists had left the country, leading to a clear whitening of Cuban hip hop, reinforced by state attempts to undermine Afro-Cuban leadership in hip hop and allied cultural sectors.

Perry's treatment is sure-footed and theoretically well informed. The processes he describes are interestingly familiar (at least to those who've read about music, race and nation in an Afro-diasporic frame), which made me eager to see Perry step outside the Cuban frame of the book to take a comparative approach that could highlight better whatever the specificities of the Cuban case might be. Compared with other countries in the hemisphere, Cuba stands out as a place where the state's regulation of culture is very strong. Yet the tensions between authenticity and selling out, of autonomy and co-optation, of blackness and nation, of race and class, of race and gender all seemed to play out in recognisable ways. Perhaps this is because Cuba is becoming increasingly marketised, but it would have been interesting to briefly compare hip hop in Cuba with, say, Colombia, Brazil or the United States. In any case, the book is an excellent contribution to the literature on music, race and citizenship.

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