The politics of contemporary Cuban rap

Kyana Waters  
Spelman College

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THE POLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY CUBAN RAP
Kyana Waters

Senior Thesis
Presented to the Department of World Languages and Literature
and the Ethel Waddell Githii Honors Program
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In this paper, I examine the political, social and cultural significance of Cuban rap through the analysis of selected rap lyrics and I analyze the discourses pertaining to this music. A discourse analysis of independent Cuban rap music excerpts is the primary method. In the Cuban context, there are rappers that are state-sponsored, meaning they are affiliated with and supported by state institutions that provide them with a government salary and resources to record, promote, and perform. On the other hand, there are independent rappers that do not receive state sponsorship and often experience a drastically different reality in trying to obtain resources, record, and perform. It is significantly more difficult and they sometimes record in homemade studios and operate through the black market. In particular, I focus on a few of the state’s strategies utilized to diminish the value of the lyrics and protests expressed by rappers in their songs, including: censorship; favoritism towards non-political performers; police harassment and closure of performances delivered by critical rappers; the role of the state in the development and promotion of rap; and the tension between the state and independent rappers. I analyze the texts of two raps: “Mandamos a Parar/We Demand That it Stop” by Los Aldeanos and “Se Acabó el Abuso (No Somos Iguales)/The Abuse is Over (We Are Not Equal)” by Las Krudas.1 These songs critique the sociopolitical condition of Cuba and challenge the state’s power. The central question of this investigation explores freedom of expression in the production of contemporary Cuban rap. The development of Cuban rap and the messages of contemporary Cuban rappers uniquely reflects the dynamic between Cuban citizens, specifically marginalized citizens (e.g., the poor, blacks and mulattos, urban populations and those displaced by the expansion of the tourism industry, women, the LGBTQ community), and the state regarding freedom of expression. This also questions the role of the government and its success or failure at achieving some of the goals of the Cuban Revolution, specifically, the goal to create a more egalitarian society, free of racial and gender-based discrimination. These selected rappers offer a different, more comprehensive perspective from several scholars that have researched this topic thus far. The voices of independent rappers themselves are crucial to understanding the potential for protest music, such as rap, as a narrative for shaping the values of Cuban people today and in the not too distant future. Hence, this investigation contributes to understanding contemporary Cuban society through the analysis of its rap music in relation to the state.

Keywords: rap, institutionalization, power, state-controlled, social change

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1 “Mandamos a Parar” is from the album Poesia Esposada (2004). I was not able to determine the album and year in which “Se Acabó el Abuso (No Somos Iguales)” was released. Titles are translated into English by author.
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Introduction

“Siempre a la ofensiva, en defensa de las vidas que anidan heridas. ¡El rap es guerra!”
“Always on the offensive, defending the lives of those that are suffering. Rap is war!”

I decided to pursue this topic after reading the article “¡Hip Hop Revolución! Nationalizing Rap in Cuba” by Geoffrey Baker. As a lover of music (particularly 1990s Rap and R&B) who also has some familiarity with the development of rap music in the U.S., the idea of “nationalizing” or institutionalizing rap seemed quite paradoxical to me. Nonetheless, as Geoffrey Baker explains, the state sponsors and promotes rap in Cuba. Baker’s article led me to dig deeper into the development of rap in Cuba in the 1990s with this question in mind: how can a genre so frequently tied to the category of “protest music”—at least during early development in the U.S. and certainly during the early development in Cuba—become institutionalized? I first questioned the authenticity of the messages these musicians delivered. By “authenticity,” I mean the extent to which a rapper expresses his or her true feelings in creating a song uncensored by the state and its preferred narrative. Learning about the limits to freedom of expression in Cuba during the Castro regime caused me to question this idea further. After all, former revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, made it very clear during his address to Cuban artists and intellectuals in June of 1961: “Inside the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing” (cited in Baker 376). How then could a protest genre be completely authentic while at the same time remaining “inside of the revolution” and the revolutionary discourse? Geoffrey Baker, a notable author on the subject of Cuban rap, demonstrates that some rappers have a more constructive style of criticizing the regime without directly attacking Cuban society or the state, but I focus on whether or not space exists for protest music that directly criticizes the state. After further

research, I learned that the idea to institutionalize rap was a collaborative effort among Cuban rappers, the state (i.e., The Ministry of Culture and the Saiz Brothers Association also known as the AHS), and foreign advocates that helped to persuade Cuban officials that rap could be used as a tool for the revolution (Baker 383). Baker explains that Nehanda Abiodun was a North American living in exile in Cuba for her participation in the black liberation movements, who became recognized as the “godmother” of Cuba’s hip-hop movement. In addition to her, other foreign advocates of the movement were the Black August Collective (of which she was a member), Harry Belafonte, and rappers that participated in Cuban rap festivals including Common, Dead Prez, The Roots, and Black Star. Through their contributions, these advocates helped to institutionalize rap as part of the Cuban hip-hop movement.

As I will discuss, Geoffrey Baker argues that the collaborative effort implies that when institutionalizing the hip-hop movement, the state did not intend to control the content of rap songs. On the contrary, implicit in his argument for collaboration was the necessity to persuade the state that this art form, typically associated with resistance, would be able to serve the revolution, signifying that if it did not serve the revolution, it would not be accepted by the state. Furthermore, during the semester of investigation that I spent in Cuba, I had the opportunity to talk to some independent rappers and producers and listen to some raps, and I discovered that Baker’s theory was not completely accurate. In this context, the term “independent” refers to the relationship between the rapper (or the producer) and the state. In Cuba, it is illegal to be an independent rapper. The artists with whom I spoke explained to me that the Cuban Rap Agency (ACR) is very exclusive and difficult to enter, and furthermore, that there are serious

3 As I will explain, there are rappers that are sponsored by the state that work for the Cuban Rap Agency (ACR) and the Saiz Brothers Association (Asociación Hermanos Saiz or AHS) and there are other rappers—the independent ones—who are not sponsored by the state.
consequences for being an independent rapper or producer, including but not limited to police harassment and incarceration.

These lingering questions regarding the role of the state in the production of rap on the island and the relationship between the rappers and the state motivated me further in my research with the ultimate goal of clarifying the condition of artists and their role in contemporary Cuban society. In order to answer my primary thesis question, I planned to investigate the discourses of rappers and the state’s involvement in the rap scene, taking into consideration that the current scholarly research I had reviewed did not fully answer my questions.

Thus this work offers a seldom studied perspective which incorporates an analysis of musical discourses through which Cuban rappers offer an alternative vision of social realities, politics, and the economy that is often omitted from official discourses. The elements of analysis are (1) the rappers’ messages, (2) the trajectory of their careers, (3) and the hidden politics of Cuban rap, that some intellectuals may not fully appreciate, which is illuminated by considering these elements that I highlight.

In this essay, I directly address the gaps in scholarship I have found in Cuba Represent! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures (2006) by Sujatha Fernandes and “¡Hip Hop, Revolución! Nationalizing Rap in Cuba” (2005) by Geoffrey Baker pertaining to the potential for the state to control the messages in Cuban rap. I analyze two songs—“Mandamos a Parar” by Los Aldeanos and “Se Acabó el Abuso (No Somos Iguales)” by Las Krudas—that underline and critique problems in Cuban society and I discuss the significance of these works. This study contributes to the understanding of freedom of expression in contemporary Cuba where these two groups produced their music (specifically in Havana) and recounts the stories of marginalized voices by exploring the work of these artists who have
defined a different relationship with the state—criticizing it, emphasizing social problems in a conscious manner, and above all continuing to produce art organically. After discussing the methods I used and the theory that I consulted, I will explain why the voices of rappers are essential to filling in gaps in scholarship and I will analyze the lyrics of their songs. In general, this study is important because it investigates the concepts of revolutionary nationalism (what type of revolution is permissible?) and citizenship (who is a real citizen and who is isolated?), the role of art, the parameters for establishing freedom of speech, and individualism in the context of a socialist society.

Methodology

My primary method of investigation is a discourse analysis. I chose this method because the voice of Cuban rappers themselves is the most critical element that I add to existing scholarly research. I begin by introducing gaps in current knowledge on the topic of Cuban rap. I draw from the work of Sujatha Fernandes and Geoffrey Baker who have done extensive research on Cuban rap through ethnographic and ethnomusicological lenses, respectively. These scholars provide the context for rap in Cuba and raise issues around the space that Cuban rap has taken and the different voices within the rap movement, which are critical to the discussion of rap and how it reflects contemporary Cuba. To support my analysis, I also draw from Kristin Bumiller’s discussion of state involvement in grassroots movements and Dean Spade’s discussion of power.

Next, I analyze the raps themselves. I have chosen two rap groups from the 2000s to explore: Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas. Both groups are from Havana and I chose them because they were very popular in Cuba (especially among the youth). The artists in both groups are people of color and they produce messages of resistance against the Cuban state. Los Aldeanos formed in 2003 and comprises two members, Aldo “El Aldeano” Rodríguez and Bian “El B”
Rodríguez. In the song “Mandamos a Parar,” they frequently criticize censorship, the institutionalization of rap, and sociopolitical injustices. They represent minorities in Cuba including young people and the poor. Las Krudas (also known as Krudas Cubensi), though they began in 1999 with a third member (Odalys Cuesta also known as “Wanda Kruda”), now comprises two members, Olivia “Pelusa Kruda” Prendes and Odaymara “Pasa Kruda” Cuesta, and the song that I analyze was created by this duo. Normally they support minorities—women and the LGBTQ community—in their songs and they frequently mention the intersection between gender and race. They are also important because they are women that are contributing to a largely male-dominated field of art. I explore this period of the 2000s, because the songs and lyrics are the easiest to obtain given the movement’s lack of organization in the 1990s. Both groups consist of members that grew up during the 1990s, witnessing the so-called “special period” and the development of the Cuban hip-hop movement. Both are also currently members of the diaspora in that they began producing rap independently in Cuba and then left the country around 2010.

I focus on their position as independent rappers while they were inside Cuba, because I believe this moment is fundamental to the understanding of the social and political involvement of their songs. Analyzing the lyrics of the songs of the pre-diasporic period, both Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas seem to approach the topic of the role of political leadership in social injustices on the island with a very frank tone. In addition, their criticisms have less influence and coercion from the state since they are producing messages against the state. Nonetheless, several of their videos produced while in Cuba have a very strong patriotic sentiment, also far from any anti-

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4 The period that launched between 1989 and 1991 is referred to as the “special period” in Cuba due to the extreme poverty that swept the island during the decade after the end of relations with Soviet Union (Fernandes 34).
Castro propaganda, which suggests that they used their platform to advocate for social change within the system in which they lived.

The first song that I analyze is “Mandamos a Parar/We Demand that it Stop” by Los Aldeanos. In this song, they provide a critical perspective of the institutionalization of rap and how state institutions limit freedom of expression and creativity of rappers. The second song I analyze is “Se Acabó el Abuso (No Somos Iguales)/ The Abuse is Over (We Are Not Equal)” by Las Krudas. Las Krudas, recorded their first album together as a duo in 2004. This song criticizes the patriarchy and calls attention to gender inequality that often leads to gendered violence. These rappers reflect a limited perspective, not the opinions of the entire Cuban rap scene. These are independent rappers of color and their audience consists of primarily younger generations. There are several perspectives reflected in Cuban rap that vary in their sociopolitical consciousness. For example, Los Aldeanos directly attack state institutions, while Las Krudas focuses on the conditions of society (i.e., state injustices and the patriarchal system), while other rappers criticize in a more constructive manner (i.e., less directed at the state). Additionally, there are critiques of the state and contemporary Cuba that have different circumstances of production, but these are chosen to get a glimpse of some of the criticism against the Cuban state and contemporary Cuban sociopolitical climate.

**Literature Review**

In *Cuba Represent! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures*, Sujatha Fernandes seeks to answer the question: “How can the [recently emerged space for criticism within artistic spheres of influence] be reconciled with the standard representations

5 See Appendix A.
6 See Appendix B.
of a repressive, authoritarian cultural apparatus?" Her methods include a textual analysis of films, rap songs, and visual artworks, ethnography, and an analysis of the historical and political economy. Sujatha Fernandes provides a history of Cuban politics and economics beginning with the Cuban Revolution to set the historical context. Then she hones in on the changing atmosphere during the 1990s’ “special period” and what she sees as a state shift toward creating spaces for critical debate, first in official organizations and later in what she terms “artistic public spheres.” She proposes that, “it is in these contested and contradictory fields that cultural producers such as filmmakers, rap musicians, and visual artists have been able to carve out semi-autonomous spaces for expression” (14-15). Her research adds to scholarship by providing reasons for this shift toward creating spaces for critical debate.

However, Fernandes has been criticized for seeing the state as a monolithic organization when, in reality, there are inconsistencies with policies concerning rap. In addition to this, I disagree with the claim that the state created spaces for critical debate, because the rappers with whom I spoke during my experience in Cuba shared contrasting narratives with me. For instance, one independent producer shared—as I have previously mentioned—that to be an independent rapper (or in his case, a producer) is illegal in the context of Cuban socialism because the state exercises the power to control artistic production and silence forces that resist the state. He described frequent occurrences in which state officials abused their power. On one occasion, the police harassed a pantomime who was peacefully protesting in the street. Another example he

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7 At the time of composing this book, Sujatha Fernandes was a professor of sociology at Queens College, City University of New York. Her background is in political science and music.

8 She defines an artistic public sphere as, “a way of capturing the dynamics of contemporary cultural production in Cuban society, which represent[s] a new kind of negotiation within and against the limits of state power and cultural markets.” She explains that, “the specific interaction of these forces is dependent on the shifting coordinates of cultural policies, markets, and alliances between artists and the state” (14).
described was the suspension of underground rap festivals by the police, a theme also explored by Los Aldeanos in “Mandamos a Parar.”

For this reason, there are underground rap festivals that occur outside of the city in private or secret areas. Young people usually travel to the outskirts to listen to this music, but it is very difficult to find transportation to these areas. There are still other small secret parties to listen to this music that take place in the city in peoples’ houses. Therefore, from my experience, the space for critical debate in artistic public spheres that Fernandes described does not exist, at least for rap, because according to this evidence, the state entities continue to control resistance even in artistic public spheres. The artists mentioned shared narratives with me that contradict Fernandes’s theories. Perhaps Fernandes did not include independent artists in her investigation or if they were in fact included, perhaps their narratives were not included in the publication of her book for whatever reason.

Geoffrey Baker is the second scholar that I draw upon. In his article, “¡Hip Hop, Revolución! Nationalizing Rap in Cuba,” he recounts some of his conversations with figures involved in the Cuban rap scene and offers valuable contributions, like Fernandes. His research adds to the field because he chronicles much of the development of the hip-hop movement leading up to institutionalization. He argues that this case of rap in Cuba is not appropriation of U.S. rap (contrary to popular belief), and he also addresses the variety of discourses (saying that they are not simply racialized discourses within rap, but also reflect the social construction of

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9 At the time of composing this article, Geoffrey Baker was a lecturer in the music department at Royal Holloway, University of London. Currently he is a Professor of Music and Director of the Institute of Musical Research there. He has a background in modern languages, early music performance, and music in Latin America. He has published a number of essays on rap and reggaetón in Havana (“Biography”). His research in this particular essay was primarily ethnographic.
Like Fernandes, however, I believe that he misses a critical factor: that the state has the capacity to control the hip-hop movement and rap music and uses this advantage. Baker argues that the rappers’ involvement in the institutionalization of rap means that it was a collaborative effort and that the state did not intend to control the movement. His perspective reflects his method of investigation which consisted of conversations with representatives and leaders of state institutions such as Alpidio Alonso Grau, president of the Saiz Brothers Association (Asociación Hermanos Saiz or AHS) in 2004 and William Figuerero, a rap promoter that worked for the AHS at the time. In my analysis, I counter this notion as well as Fernandes’s by showing the ways in which the state is controlling much of the rap production in the hip-hop movement.

My investigations contribute a new perspective to the existing scholarship. First, in contrast to Fernandes’s arguments, I assert that the space for critical debate in artistic public spheres was not created by the state. I also do not consider the state a monolith, because I understand that the support of rap music by institutions like the ACR and the AHS and the support from national radio and television stations is incoherent. On the other hand, I think that in the context of Cuban socialism, national organizations abide by the state’s rules and do not support messages that resist the state, because it is a practice that government institutions and socialism have instituted. Thus, when I refer to the state, I am referring to the collective institutions that represent or reflect the government as opposed to one monolithic entity. Even though the state is not a monolith, I believe that the operations of state institutions and the culture

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10 **Social Construction of Space**: The idea that we occupy, construct, redefine, influence and use urban spaces based on our criteria and necessities... a result of an important number of different movements, choices and occupations that take place in our daily lives in constructed spaces (translation provided by author of definition derived from Medina).
of Cuban socialism have created a collective campaign to combat dissidence and sources of resistance against the state and political leadership. In the case of Baker, I believe that his contributions such as the history of the development of the hip-hop movement and the interviews with ACR and AHS officials are valuable, but his conclusion that the state did not intend to control or censor the content in rap music is inaccurate. I include the perspectives of independent rappers that represent marginalized voices and this inclusion suggests that the state seeks to limit freedom of expression and that there is not much space for critical debate.

Chapter 1: Validating Rappers’ Voices

Shortcomings of Scholarship

The economic turmoil of the late 1980s and the official collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in August 1991, caused severe economic turmoil for the Cuban state and initiated what Fidel Castro termed “a special period in a time of peace” (Fernandes 34). Fernandes argues that the period from 1993-1996 saw unprecedented economic liberalization and political freedoms as the Cuban state sought to secure foreign investment and “improve its human rights record” (38). In 1995, official dissident organizations formed, but by 1997, this period had closed and the state began cracking down on dissidence and economic freedom once more (40). Fernandes suggests that with the prohibition of formal political activities, critical debate shifted to take place in spheres of art and culture, where the state, “perhaps surprisingly, began tolerating greater diversity and freedom of cultural expression” (40). She attributes this perceived tolerance of debate through art and culture to a fear of creating further dissidence that members of Cuban leadership held (40-41). Perhaps, surprised by the amount of dissidence revealed in this short period, the Cuban leadership felt the need to leave some space for debate to appease and simultaneously contain dissidents. In this way, Fernandes illustrates a shift toward
critical debate in art from strict censorship, before 1993, to uneasy tolerance to collaboration and incorporation of critical art by the early 2000s. One example of this collaboration is the creation of the Cuban Rap Agency (ACR), in 2002, under the Ministry of Culture, led by Abel Prieto at the time. According to Fernandes, “Prieto [became] a proponent [in the late 1990s] of creating controlled spaces for critical debate” (41). One question that I consider is: how critical can these debates be if they are still “controlled” by the state?

To answer this question, I draw upon Dean Spade’s discussion of power (2015).11 Power is essential to the understanding of this question, because ultimately, that is what the control of critical debate or, more simply, the censorship of language is about. Censoring the language of the rappers dictates what messages are given to the audience and therefore what an engaged audience may then think about. This takes power away from rappers by limiting their influence on the people to whatever the state allows through lyrical content. If messages are being spread about resisting the police or protesting the state’s leadership, then people are going to absorb that message and have the potential to act on it. Whereas, if messages are spread praising the revolution and political leadership or criticizing the United States’ involvement in Cuba, the audience will absorb these messages and think of these instead. By no means am I suggesting that the audience receives content passively, nor that the messages they absorb determine or correspond to their thought process. However, if rappers that produce messages of resistance have an audience that follows and supports them, as is the case for Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas, it signifies that the audience likely holds a general consensus with either the art, the messages within the art, or both. Thus these rappers have created a community that, by listening to their music, is resisting the state that in turn does not support these rappers. If this cultural

11 Dean Spade is an Assistant Professor at the Seattle University School of Law and the founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, a non-profit organization that offers free legal aid to transgender, intersex, and gender nonconforming people who are low-income and/or people of color. For this investigation, I utilize his theory of decentralized power.
production continues to grow “underground,” perhaps the audience will grow as well. By censoring the language, the Cuban state attempts to prevent further dissent.

Citing other authors, Spade (2015) describes power as decentralized. It is not merely one individual or institution but also includes:

- routines of bureaucracy;
- the theories, programmes, knowledge and expertise that compose a field to be governed and invest it with purposes and objectives;
- the ways of seeing and representing embedded in practices of government;
- different agencies with capacities that the practices of government require, elicit, form and reform. (4)

The creation of the ACR was part of this “routine” or “practice” of the Cuban state—to create a way of defining the terms of the “critical debates” produced by rappers. Before 2002, the Cuban state did not have a way of dealing with rap as an art form. Political leadership largely rejected it early on as contrary to the interests of the state. The messages were too “violent” and supposedly counterproductive for cultural development (“Rap Cubano”). The “routine” of Fidel Castro’s administration since the very beginning was to create regulatory institutions that would advance the administration’s goals.¹² This agency was a similar sort of organization. Despite Geoff Baker’s insistence that the creation of this institution was not about control because it involved Cuban rappers in the process (“¡Hip Hop, Revolución!” 393), I argue it was at least partially about control and power. Exercising control and power was already the custom for a state that had a history of creating institutions that would reinforce the revolutionary objectives and censor

¹² As Fernandes describes, Castro launched Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) in 1960, following the revolution, “as systems of collective vigilance and popular participation, and by 1961 their membership was said to be over one million. The CDRs set out to promote urban reform, education, and public health programs by organizing neighborhood meetings, distributing printed materials, and ringing doorbells. The large scope of the mobilization and the sense of popular participation in pursuit of a common goal led to a dynamic collective empowerment that had a strong impact on the lives of many Cubans. At the same time, the solidarity generated among those Cubans who supported and worked for the revolution turned them against anyone who was ambivalent about the revolutionary project; Cubans who had left the country or openly expressed dissent were scorned as gusanos (worms).” (29)
any opposition. As Spade illustrates, government institutions and their affiliates, The Cuban Rap Agency included, reflect and implement the practices of the government.

In Chapter 3, Fernandes details the development of rap within the Cuban hip-hop movement during the 1990s, accounting for influences of rap and messages within early rap. She also differentiates between commercial and underground rap. This distinction is not completely clear because commercial rap and underground rap have overlapping features in terms of musical styles and messages, but Fernandes equates underground with political:

In Cuba the dichotomy between authenticity and success is further complicated by the state’s promotion of underground rap. Cuban rappers who maintain a political orientation are more likely to receive state sponsorship than the commercial rappers, so that the association of underground with exclusion from the mainstream is disrupted. (95)

This assertion is rather problematic, because based on the majority of my research, the state’s promotion of rap does not function this way. First, the rappers that I have chosen to analyze—Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas—have maintained a political orientation but were not sponsored by the state consistently. In fact, the Cuban state banned the music of Los Aldeanos from being played on state radio and sold in state-owned shops because it was too critical. This means they are also banned from producing music on state-owned record labels and when they were in Cuba they recorded much of their music in friends’ studios ("Cuba’s disaffected youth"). Though it is difficult to track the current locations of these rappers, it appears that all of them have left Cuba, likely due to lack of promotion or other problems with the state. Second, according to Geoffrey Baker, the state did not support the hip-hop movement in other state organizations such as radio and television ("¡Hip Hop, Revolución!") 395). Therefore, the examples of both Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas and the evidence of Geoffrey Baker suggest that Fernandes’s conclusion that the
state supports rappers with a greater political orientation more than commercial rappers is not entirely correct.

On State Involvement in a People’s Movement

From Kristin Bumiller’s (2008) analysis of state involvement in the 1960s feminist anti-violence campaign in the United States, a parallel can be drawn to the Cuban state’s institutionalization of the hip-hop movement. Even though Bumiller refers to a moment in the 1960s, her analysis of the role of government in a popular movement is similar to the involvement of the Cuban state in the hip-hop movement during the early 2000s, because the state did not fulfill the objectives that the rappers desired. Bumiller argues that the original intentions of this grassroots feminist movement,\textsuperscript{13} were obscured after the involvement of the neoliberal state. The state altered the campaign’s agenda (part of which began with an “anti-state” philosophy) and even diverted many of the problems to non-feminist mainstream organizations. The Cuban state’s involvement in shaping the hip-hop movement and possibly altering the messages that were originally produced by underground rappers arguably has had a similar outcome. As I will explain in my discourse analysis of selected raps next, some rappers feel that the state has limited their ability to critique the sociopolitical environment of Cuba.

The reason for mentioning these shortcomings of scholarship and Bumiller’s analysis is to stress that the voices and personal experiences of Cuban rappers are important to the discussion and understanding of this subject. Several aforementioned claims by Fernandes and Baker conflict with statements by the rappers themselves regarding the rap scene in Cuba (i.e., the role of the rappers and the role of the state) while Spade’s analysis shows the state’s potential to control content within rap in a decentralized manner and Bumiller’s analysis demonstrates the

\textsuperscript{13} According to Bumiller, the campaign was initiated to “[call] attention to the realities of violence in women’s lives and particularly how rape was used as a tool to subordinate women to men” (2).
potential for a state to alter the agenda of a people’s movement. Using a discourse analysis in chapter 2, I demonstrate that these spheres of art and culture are not as open for critical debate as Fernandes and Baker suggest and that the involvement of state institutions has obscured the integrity of socially and politically conscious rap similar to Bumiller’s example.

Chapter 2: Voices of Cuban Rappers

Los Aldeanos

The first song that I analyze is “Mandamos a Parar/We Demand that it Stop” by Los Aldeanos. It was released in 2004 on their second album, Poesia Esposada, under the label 26Musas/Real70 which is an independent label run by Cuban rapper, Papá Humbertico, in his home in Havana. The album title, Poesia Esposada, translates literally to “handcuffed poetry” and laments how several Cuban rappers cannot express themselves freely through their art. The song itself is about the role of rap and draws a distinction between “real” rap and “fake” rap. In characterizing these two kinds of rap, Los Aldeanos raise the issue of state control and concerns regarding commercialization in favor of a higher purpose for rap as an art form.

Considering this narrative about rap and Sujatha Fernandes’s theories about the state’s role in shaping artistic public spheres such as the hip-hop movement in Cuba, I show that instead of creating a considerably more open environment for criticism through art, the Cuban state has actually continued to shape and control much of the art that is produced. However, there are rappers such as Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas that have undermined the laws and prohibitions of state institutions. So as a result of creating institutions to shape the hip-hop movement, the Cuban state also created a community of resistant independent artists that feel isolated and produce their art without the support of the state. In fact, these artists circulate their music illegally, person to person or underground. This example demonstrates that it is indeed possible
to produce art that criticizes the state, but there are consequences (e.g., legal) and it must be done without the resources and support of state institutions.

In 2002, the Cuban Rap Agency was created under the Ministry of Culture in order to “professionalize” rappers, provide them with the same benefits as any other government employee, and give them resources that, previously, were difficult to access on their own. Professionalization is emphasized because according to some rappers, like Papá Humbertico, the creation of this institution was merely a way to control the content of the rap songs (Rodriguez). Other artists complained that the commercialization of rap by the state not only tainted the message, but changed it in a way that it became more like reggaetón which became popular on the island around the same time. After reggaetón started to become successful, rap’s popularity began to dwindle. From my own experience in Cuba, talking to rappers and other young people, it seemed that reggaetón was the most popular music to listen to among young people and if rap was to survive, it would have to fuse with other genres. In an interview with Papá Humbertico, the rapper stated that, “Reggaeton is purely for fun. When you listen to it, you don’t think. This is what the government wants: alcohol and reggaeton” (Rodriguez). His opinion seems inconsistent with the Castro regime’s policies immediately following the revolution when the government censored artistic production, for example, movies and documentaries that promoted alcohol consumption. However, it’s possible that policies have changed since that time period and Papá Humbertico’s opinion is based on contemporary times where the government may prefer to support a genre more focused on partying than social change. On the other hand, it could be that the government changed some socialist policies to focus more on tourism and

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14 Compared to rap music, reggaetón is more frequently characterized as ostentatious or meaningless and normally the lyrics objectify women or talk about sex, money and commodities as commercial rap in the U.S. often has. U.S. rap music influenced Cuban rap music and it appears that there is a similar controversy between rap music and reggaetón in Cuba like the controversy that has existed between political and commercial rap in the U.S.
attracting foreign investment in the 1990s and that this has resulted in a change in politics that, in
effect, support alcohol consumption and listening to reggaetón. Therefore the supposed
promotion of reggaetón and alcohol would be linked to the rise in tourism and the focus on
foreign investment. These are simply inferences. Nevertheless, rap music originally developed in
Cuba as a political genre and the content was largely a response to injustice within Cuban
society. Since reggaetón permeated the island in the early 2000s, it has presented a threat to
political rap music, which has struggled to survive since the beginning.

In “Mandamos a Parar,” Los Aldeanos directly confront the problem of reggaetón and the
rap that leans more towards hedonism than political criticism. In the introduction, the last line
before the chorus begins, they say, “The fun is over.” The word that means fun is *diversión* and
here it most likely connotes foolishness and frivolousness, setting the tone of the song as very
serious from the beginning. Throughout the song, there are several references that return to this
notion of fun that the rappers are addressing and attacking. For instance, in the chorus, they also
repeat, “Yes, the fun is going to come to an end, we have arrived and we demand that it stop.”
By asserting that they are going to put an end to the fun, they are establishing their own sense of
authority that sets them apart from foolishness and equips them to bring a sense of seriousness
that other rappers cannot bring. Los Aldeanos continue to create this dichotomy of real and
phony rap by characterizing rap as real, conscious, and “sincere” while creating this other so-
called “false” rap that is “toxic.” In the song, Los Aldeanos associate “fake” rap with the
influence or control of the state:

I pass [the fakeness/the fun] in a Bureau doing hip-hop in my style
And I do my background vocals reluctantly like a dog for Pablo Herrera

[...]

20
Brothers, stop the foolishness already,
because neither [Alpidio Alonso] nor his henchmen know what Hip-Hop is

It doesn’t please me that Susana [García] enjoys obscuring Cuba’s urban poetry

[...] Everything here is not Hip-Hop and revolution as it seems

[...] It is cruel, the blackmail that we are subjected to, (you know it)

Those fucked up scumbags that have controlled us,

Festivals suspended for stupid reasons,

That proves that bullshit runs things in the institutions

State influence and control is represented by references to state institutions such as the Bureau and state figures such as Pablo Herrera, “Cuba’s longest established and most prolific rap producer,” who also played a crucial “role in mediating between the expectations of the state, rappers, and foreign observers” (“¡Hip Hop, Revolución!” 375).

Also mentioned are Alpidio Alonso and Susana García. Alpidio Alonso was the president of the Asociación Hermanos Saiz (the cultural wing of the Union of Young Communists) at the time and “the primary force behind the organization of the [10th Havana Hip Hop Festival in August 2004]” (368) in which Los Aldeanos participated (381). All of these figures hold very influential positions in the hip-hop scene, but are accused of not knowing what real hip-hop is, allowing the promotion and production of fake music, blaspheming the name of revolution, and even blackmailing rappers. This is important because first, it suggests, in contrast to Fernandes (2006), that the state is controlling the messages in Cuban rap. Second, in the YouTube video that I found of “Mandamos a Parar,” someone censored the names of Alpidio Alonso and Susana

15 Translation into English provided by author.
Garcia.\(^{16}\) It’s not clear who is responsible for the censorship, but whether the state censored or the artists and producers censored it themselves is less relevant. It is still an example of how the state exercises control over messages of resistance, either directly or by creating an environment that penalizes for acts of resistance. Third, this fragment associates rap with revolution, more specifically, a revolution against the Cuban state. This is a critique of how rap is marketed in Cuba with a message of revolution and debate while limiting what can be said in these debates.\(^{17}\)

In other excerpts, Los Aldeanos also characterize fake rap as commercial:

My plans aren’t to retire, but rather to become

One of the real emcees that don’t just make hip-hop in order to leave the country

[...]

Like those emcees that think they’re hard but they’re more mediocre than SBS

[...]

Today a huge mass of self-proclaimed real ones prevail,

That afterwards, leave for places where they collide,

With money, with cups, with fame, with lunatics, with clothes\(^{18}\)

Here, Los Aldeanos laments that many rappers have sold out for the purposes of commercial success. This is important because it attributes a higher purpose to real rap—that it is not about money or fame (also forms of control). They even name a group that they consider fake, S.B.S. (Sensational Boys of the Street). I am not familiar with S.B.S., but after watching one video on


\(^{17}\) To support this assertion by Los Aldeanos, Baker mentions an experience in which Alpidio Alonso described the purpose of the hip-hop festival to him. In August 2004, Alpidio Alonso “described the aim of the festival: ‘to project a revolutionary message from Cuba, a commitment to the cause of the downtrodden in the world.’ Rap in Cuba, he told me, embodied a struggle to change the world through ideas and music, and so ‘it’s very symbolic that this event takes place in Cuba, with rappers who come mainly from Latin America, from countries that are subject to this imperialist pseudo-cultural invasion’” ("Hip Hop, Revolución!" 368).

\(^{18}\) Translation into English provided by author.
YouTube, I gather that they are one of the groups that sing about non-critical topics that are also censored by the government to exclude vulgar language. The video appears to include influences from pop and salsa, displays images of a beach paradise and half-naked women, and even includes some corny choreography. While establishing this notion of fake rap as state-controlled and commercial, they also define what they call “real” rap. In addition to independence from state-control and commerciality, “real” rap “speak[s] about their lives, not about what is convenient,” as El B explains in “Mandamos a Parar.” In this sense, El B implies that he will not risk his message of resistance against the state for success, fame, money, not even to leave the country. Remember, when Los Aldeanos produced this song, they were still living on the island. Even though they eventually left the country, they had no other option and this is the difference between Los Aldeanos and the “fake” rappers that they talk about in “Mandamos a Parar.” Music is a very important part of the lives of Aldo and Bian Rodríguez so when the state prohibited them from performing it or playing it publicly, they decided to leave.

Los Aldeanos most likely obtained this notion of authentic rap as political rap from the influence of the political rap in the United States which initially emerged to combat state-sanctioned violence, increased unemployment, widespread poverty, and gang violence from the 1960s to the 1980s (“¡Hip Hop, Revolución!” 382-83; Hurt 01:14:10-01:15:46). The common thread for both early U.S. rap and Cuban “real” rap is independent thought and self-expression

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19 SBS Sensational Boys of the Street, Dale Candela, YouTube, 4:17. Accessed 26 Nov. 2016. Video was originally published in 2000 and shot in Brazil.
20 Convenience could be interesting to explore because several factors could impact the decision for rappers to choose convenience. For many people (particularly of color) in Cuba, gaining commercial fame as a performer is a rare opportunity to leave Cuba and the poverty or political oppression. Therefore, I believe El B means to say that rappers that leave the country in search of fame and perhaps money, begin by working with the Cuban state. Fernandes described this situation in which the state began to commercializing artistic and cultural production in order to augment foreign investment in Cuba (10). In summary, she explains that some artists had the opportunity to leave the country and represent the state in other parts of the world. This was one way in which artists could work with the state and go on to achieve international stardom. Despite the “convenient” benefits of working with the state, El B does not want to risk his reputation of resistance against the state for his music,
on daily issues which, arguably, is not “marketable” or popular if it doesn’t advance state agendas or distract people from important issues.

Los Aldeanos’ position is clear: the purpose of “real” rap is to inspire thought, action, and revolution to improve society. This rap is valuable because it is for the people, not for the state. Ultimately, this song is important because Los Aldeanos claim rap as a tool for sociopolitical change in Cuban society and their resistance against state influence and commercialization builds power for this movement. The fact that their audience is Cuba’s next generation means they may be able to influence the sociopolitical climate in Cuba for future generations. Even though they have emigrated from Cuba, they still retain their influence and have the capacity to fight for the next generation’s rights as much as they can. After 2011, the state no longer permitted the performance (live or prerecorded) of their music, so they lost a platform for sharing their messages with Cuban audiences. In my opinion, the decision to leave the country was the only suitable option they had. Today, they work together on occasion, but sometimes they work separately, continuing to create music. I believe this division could affect the influence they have had as a duo, but regardless, they continue with the same messages and Cuba’s youth have ways of distributing their music, though the state prohibits broadcasting it on radio and television. Obviously, their influence has not completely disappeared from the island.

Las Krudas

The second song that I analyze is “Se Acabó el Abuso (No Somos Iguales)/ The Abuse is Over (We Are Not Equal)” by the rap group Krudas Cubensi also known as Las Krudas. Las Krudas currently comprises two rappers, Olivia Prendes and Odaymara Cuesta. Their songs

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21 It was difficult to determine what album this song came from but there is a recording posted on YouTube on March 4, 2012 by Cristilaverde that proves it was certainly produced before then. According to their biography, Las Krudas emigrated from Havana, Cuba to Austin, Texas in 2006. The purpose of trying to identify the album of this piece was to provide more context for the critique in the song and who (what society) is being criticized.
typically advocate for women and the LGBTQ community. This particular song criticizes gendered violence as well as the patriarchal structures that allow for violence against women to occur without consequence. As Fernandes (2006) describes, after the Cuban revolution, the political leadership of the new socialist state “took a largely economic approach…to discrimination against blacks and women” in order to “eliminate discrimination by sex and race from Cuban society” (31). Fernandes highlights a few problems with this approach that have allowed women’s oppression to persist:

Drawing on traditional Engelsian arguments about the causes of sexual oppression as linked to women’s confinement to reproductive tasks in the patriarchal family, the Cuban political leadership had maintained that liberation from sexual oppression was to be found through women’s participation in the workplace. The Cuban state set up a mass organization, the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women, FMC), to educate women and eliminate prostitution, but it proceeded on the assumption that the revolution had ended patriarchy and that women were free to embrace their new role in society. (31)

This addresses the political approach most heavily felt in the 1960s and 70s that has continued to be part of Cuban socialist ideology. According to Dean Spade, the “affective registers of neoliberalism are attuned to notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ that obscure systemic inequalities” (22). Cuban political leadership created the same notion of freedom by claiming that they had dismantled the barriers that allowed for the discrimination of blacks, women, and other marginalized peoples when in reality, they obscured the existence of racism and sexism which then was revealed and critiqued during this period of economic hardship in the 1990s.
The significance of this song by Las Krudas is that it identifies the failure of the political leadership to eradicate gender discrimination and sexual oppression while the state maintains that the society is largely egalitarian. While this song is applicable to other societies and does not directly name the Cuban state, I believe that the Cuban state, if not the only focus of the criticism, is certainly one of them. The first line may allude to the egalitarian ideal of gender equality in Cuban society as Pelusa Kruda (Olivia Prendes) asserts that, “There are those that dare claim that women and men are equal.” This is one goal of the revolution that Cuban leadership and their institutions help to reinforce, but here Pelusa Kruda challenges the claim that this ideal has been fulfilled. In this next excerpt, she blames the existence of gender inequality on the patriarchy by reciting a list of gender norms society creates for women:

Tell me, should I strip naked a beautiful body?
Tell me, should I shave my arms like a filthy person?
Tell me, should I be like this (like this): Domestic, frugal,
thin, vivid, funny, dramatic, rhythmic, melodic, poetic
until vulgar, ordinary, never stepping outside of the norm,
ever different so that I may eventually be accepted [by all],
and with all of this, I know so many women like this
and they haven’t achieved anything, are not accepted, are not happy,
they don’t even know their noses, (they don’t know them).  

This list of gender norms is powerful because in essence, Pelusa Kruda, is claiming that they are responsible for gender inequality and gendered violence. She argues that they create the environment that puts pressure on women and endangers them. Pasa Kruda (Odaymara Cuesta) goes one step further to illustrate a case of rape committed by a state official:

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22 Translation into English provided by author.
She left the Hip Hop party around 2am Saturday night.

The guy, super serious, plaid shirt, badge and insignia of an official, dark street, struggle,

Slap in the face, screams, fight, humiliation, internal fractures,
eternal injuries, sexual assault

Many fucked-up people want to fuck us, whichever one of us will take the bait,

Violence is not always visible nor is it always physical,
sometimes it is recondite or subliminal

Macho culture, brute force, I, a curvy woman,

Rape can occur in a bed, in a car, it can be a stranger or your dearest husband,

but it can also be in the air that I breathe, in the history that they have taught me,

Wake up!23

The illustration of a state official committing this crime could be symbolic of state abuse but it could also be literal, meaning one of the problems with rape cases is that people in power are often the ones committing them, which makes them hard to prosecute. Pasa Kruda’s verse is also important because it urges people to think critically about what is considered violence and to see these subliminal forms of gender discrimination and abuse that are embedded in patriarchal society. She is critiquing the culture that is created with gender norms.

As in the case of Los Aldeanos, Las Krudas emigrated from the island and they also form a part of the diaspora. Nevertheless, they have retained an audience in Cuba that continues to follow them and support their art and their messages. Even still, the geographic distance has the potential to change the effect of their activism and the impact on social change that they seek, propose and demand in their songs. Part of this loss of impact is due to the geographic

23 Translation into English provided by author.
dislocation, in that their shows will no longer take place on the island, but they perform from the United States and deal with the resulting complexities of that distance. Nevertheless, the work of both Las Krudas and Los Aldeanos helps to create a space for discussion and critique that is powerful and essential in contemporary Cuban society.

**Conclusion**

Scholarly research on Cuban rap suggests that its institutionalization promotes critical debate and freedom of expression. Yet independent rappers offer a vastly different perspective. A critical review of the lyrics of two songs released in the 2000s by two rap duos, Los Aldeanos and Las Krudas, that I have proposed, are an example of this alternate perspective. These two rap groups are very popular because they have produced music in Havana and outside of Cuba, that has never been sponsored by the state and that continues with a narrative of resistance even after leaving the island.

The works, taken into consideration, send a contrasting message that denies the idea that the state has created space for more discussion and criticism within rap, and reveals state control and influence over the messages in rap music (e.g., through professionalization). It also reveals some contemporary concerns of Cuban citizens, those that have taken that risk. This thesis contributes a fresh perspective to the discussion on the role of the state in influencing rap music and the limitations on freedom of expression in Cuba.

The importance of this study lies in the direct investigation of the messages within the rap music produced by rappers that represent the margins: the poor, people living in urban centers and those who have been displaced, blacks and mulattos, women, and the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, I consider their narratives like other forms of artistic and intellectual expression, thus proposing a way of understanding rap from a perspective that is frequently ignored. The
music created by these rappers confronts the state and social injustice, giving voice to dissidence. By presenting messages of social resistance that demand change, these rappers take power that the state has claimed. Surely their work will have a great impact on the future of Cuban society. Now, we must continue to listen to this underground rap and wait to see if these measures are enough to bring serious sociopolitical change to Cuba.
Appendix A: Lyrics of “Mandamos a Parar” by Los Aldeanos. English Translation provided by the author.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandamos a Parar</th>
<th>We Demand that it Stop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Estribillo]</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los aldeanos,</td>
<td>Los Aldeanos,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te guste o no te guste se mantienen,</td>
<td>Whether you like it or not we’re here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin miedo,</td>
<td>Without fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poniéndole traspiés a los trenes,</td>
<td>Tripping up those trains,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A que vienes,</td>
<td>That you come on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si la diversión se va acabar,</td>
<td>Yes, the fun will come to an end,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llegamos nosotros y mandamos a parar,</td>
<td>We have arrived and we demand that it stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[El Aldeano:] Cuando hay eventos buenos,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocos me tiran un timbrazo,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahí me doy cuenta quienes son sinceros y quienes son falsos,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Me la paso en un buró haciendo Hip-Hop a mi manera,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y hago mis background molando perreando a Pablo Herrera,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me pregunto si en las venas llevan Hip-Hop o envidia,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pues después que pulmonean no le dan ni 1 peso a William,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familia, un cable no se jamen, porque el pino ponga temas míos y no tenga fanes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al final, hay muchos aldeanos y vianes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que han vendido a ocultas nuestros estilo allá en el callejón de jamel [sic],</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahora, pa’ que se la mamen bien,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Entre mis planes no esta retirarme sino situarme en,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La diminuta lista de verdaderos ensis [sic].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que no hacen Hip-Hop solamente para salir del país, Yo;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por suerte mis hermanos de la prosa oscura,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me han abierto bien los ojos y me han aclarado dudas, Yo</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PAR DE FIGURAS POR ESTO METIENDO EL PECHO.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTIENDO MÁS LAPICES QUE STEVEN SEAGAL HUESOS,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLECCIONISTAS DE PESCUESOS A LA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Chorus]</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Aldeanos,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Whether you like it or not we’re here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without fear</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tripping up those trains,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That you come on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, the fun will come to an end,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have arrived and we demand that it stop.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[El Aldeano:] When there are events,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Few ring the bell for me</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There I realize who is sincere and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is fake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pass [the fakeness/the fun] in a Bureau doing hip-hop in my style,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I do my background vocals reluctantly like a dog for Pablo Herrera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask myself if in their veins flows hip-hop or envy,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Well after they rap, they don’t give even one cent to William,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, they aren’t stuffed with wires, since the guy raps the same themes but has no fans</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In all, there are many Aldeanos and Bianes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>That have sold on the low our styles out on Callejón de Hamel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now, so they suck it real good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My plans aren’t to retire, but rather to become</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the real emcees that don’t just make hip-hop in order to leave the country, Yo;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By luck, my brothers of the same prose,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’ve opened my eyes and removed doubts, Yo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOR THIS REASON, FEW EVEN BOTHER TO GET INVOLVED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAKING MORE PENCILS THAN STEVEN SEAGAL BONES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLECTORS OF PRIDE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30
ORDEN,
APARTANDO LO QUE ESTORBE
FORMANDO TREMENDOS CORTES,
Dime consorte: a que coño te dedicas,
A cantar para después engatusar a todas las
chicas,
Esto por si necesitas joder con los aldeanos,
Tu cabrona más te va que te la guardes y
andes piano,
Hermanos, dejen ya la guanaja, que ni Elpidio
[ *sic *] ni sus secuaces saben que cojone es el
Hip-Hop,
No me da la gana, de que le de la gana,
A Susana de opacar la urbana poesía cubana,
Damas y caballeros, se acabo la diversión,
 llegamos y mandamos a parar oíste cabron,
Aquí no todo, es Hip-Hop y revolución como
parece,
Como esos ensis que se creen duros y están
más flojos que SBS, Vamos.

[Estribillo]

[El B:] Rodeados de una falsedad y una
mediocridad que abruma,
Donde a muy pocos ensis les queda tinta en la
pluma,
Donde suma mas, nuevos talentos bajo la
presión,
De una vieja escuela en edad de jubilación,
Muchos son, los que sin razón, gritan
revolución,
Y en cada canción ignoran su profesión
verdadera,
Relájate y coopera, mi consorte espera,
No se puede hacer Hip- Hop con una musa,
carpintera,
Hoy impéra una gran masa de autollamados
reales,
Que después de echarla salen a lugares donde
chocan,
Con Money, con copas, con notas, con locas,
con ropas,
Y no quieren que el numerito se les riegue
entre la tropa,
Me choca ser subestimado por el gran potaje,
De aquellos que cada 15 estrofas te dan un mensaje,
Imbeciles, porque esperan que me raje,
Cuando su flow es de seda y sus liriquitas de encaje,
Es salvaje el chantaje al que estamos sometidos, (tu lo sabes)
Los jodidos mal nacidos que mas nos han dirigidos,
Festivales suspendidos por estupidas razones,
Que demuestra que la mierda reina en las instituciones,
Impresiones de dos seres que desde que vienen se mantienen,
Más reales, que los reportajes de la CNN,
Hablando lo que viven, no lo que conviene nene,
Y haciendo con la rima lo que le sale del pene,
A que vienes, si no tienes nada que buscar, nada,
Se acabo la diversión porque mandamos a parar, seguro,
Sin dudar es hora de despertar hermanos, que el movimiento se estanca con el avance del descaro,
Se montaron, en el camello de la rima toxica,
Que hace mover el cuello a velocidad súper sonica,
Letras lógicas, no cómicas con crónicas,
Y pide permiso atrás del coro que te quedas en la próxima.

[Estribillo x2]

Esto es pa´ que te pique y te moleste,
Pa´ que cuando nos veas brinques para hacer el frente,
Esto es pa´que no invente,
Este tu niño, esto es pa´ que nos recuerde,

UNDERGROUND

ES LO QUE HAY, RESPETA, REAL CULTURA HIP-HOP,
DEJATE DE ABUSO, ESTAS OYENDO

stanzas gives you a message,
Imbeciles, for they wait for me to fail,
When their flow is silky and their little lyrics of lace,
It is cruel, the blackmail that we are subjected to, (you know it)
Those f*cked up scum bags that have controlled us,
Festivals suspended for stupid reasons,
That proves that bullshit runs things in the institutions,
Opinions of two beings that have been the same since the beginning,
More real, than the reports on CNN,
Speaking about their lives, not about what is convenient,
And doing with rhymes [obscene language],
Don’t look any further,
The fun is over because we will stop it, surely,
Without a doubt, it is time to wake up brothers, that the movement is stagnant with the advance of insolence,
They have gotten on the camel of the toxic rhythm that makes you move your neck at supersonic speed,
Logical lyrics, not funny but with stories,
And that asks after the chorus that you stay for the next one

[Chorus x2]

This is so that you are hooked and bothered
So that when you see us, you jump up to make the front,
This is so that you don’t invent,
This, bro, is so that you remember us

UNDERGROUND

THIS IS IT, RESPECT, REAL HIP-HOP CULTURE, STOP THE ABUSE, YOU’RE HEARING THIS, NUEVO VEDADO, REPRESENT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESTO, NUEVO VEDADO, REPRESENT</th>
<th>UNDERGROUND</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDERGROUND</td>
<td>UNTIL NEXT TIME</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOS COJEMOS EN LA PROXIMA</td>
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</table>
Appendix B: Lyrics of “Se Acabó el Abuso/No Somos Iguales” by Krudas Cubensi. English Translation provided by the author.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Se Acabó el Abuso/No Somos Iguales</th>
<th>The Abuse is Over/ We Are Not Equal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[PELUSA]: Hay quienes se atreven a decir que las mujeres y los hombres somos iguales. Quieren [sic] que me comporte de acuerdo a sus caprichos sociedad? Lo siento, esa no es mi prioridad. No la es.</td>
<td>[PELUSA]: There are those that dare say that women and men are equal. Do you want me to act in accord with your fancy, society? I’m sorry, that’s not my priority. It’s not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violencia engendra violencia si la tienes en tu mesa cada día nunca vas a alcanzar sabiduría. Si alimentan [sic] su cuerpo y sus neuronas con productos de la muerte y del abuso, no preguntan[sic] porque el cruce se puso como se puso. Al final cuál diferencia esencial [sic] da derecho al ser humano a maltratar o asesinar a cualkier [sic] animal y hasta su propia hermana o hermano? Sigue, sigue chupando sangre, sigue, sigue comiendo hueso, todo es violencia y por eso, hay tanta peste y desgracias en la tierra, yo, Pelusa, te reafirmo, el carnivorismo es origen de la guerra, cerca de esos ataques no queremos estar, pero si nos vienen pa’riba: Taekwondo lucha libre, Hip Hop si se pone fula el punto, ¿qué hago yo? Taekwondo lucha libre Hip Hop, si se pone fula el punto, hay que partirlo, Todas y todos sufrimos violación, pero dichava, nosotras, somos primer escalafón. Dime, debo desnudar un bello cuerpo? Dime debo afeitarme las axilas como un puerco? Dime debo ser así, así: Doméstica, económina [sic], raquítica, gráfica, cómica, dramática, rítmica, melódica, poética y hasta vulgar, muy común y corriente, nunca salirme de la norma, nunca diferente pa’ lograr ser aceptada, y con to’ y eso , las conozco muchísimas que son así y no han logrado nada, no son felices, no conocen ni sus narices, no las conocen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered violence. Violence, if, you have it on your table every day you’ll never become wise. If you feed your body and neurons with products of death and abuse, Don’t ask why the junction became what it has become. At the end, what essential difference gives human beings the right to mistreat or kill whichever animal even their own sister or brother? Go on, keep sucking blood, eating bone, everything is violence and for that reason there is so much plague and disgrace on this earth. I, Pelusa, reaffirm you, the carnivorism [sic] is the origin of war, We don’t want to be close to those attacks, but yes they take us up there: Taekwondo, freedom fight, Hip Hop, if the guy becomes furious? What do I do? Taekwondo, freedom fight, Hip Hop, if the guy becomes furious? You gotta fight! All of us suffer rape but It can be said that we women are harder hit. Tell me, should I strip naked because I’m beautiful? Tell me, should I shave my armpits like a pig? Tell me should I be this way or that way: Domestic, frugal, mother, graphic, funny, dramatic, rhythmic, melodic, poetic until vulgar, very common and current, never step outside of the norms Never different in order to be accepted. I know so many women with all of that that have achieved nothing, are unhappy and don’t even know their own noses, they don’t know them.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Representación corpórea de este drama, se acabó el abuso,
victoria pa' las damas, no, no, no somos iguales.

[PASA:] Ella salía del bonche Hip Hop más allá de las dos, sábado en la noche.
El punto pinta súper serio, camisa a cuadros, chapa y cuño de algún ministerio, calle oscura forcejeo,
Bofetón, gritos, lucha dura, humillación, fracturas internas, heridas eternas, violencia entrepiernas,
mucho gente jodida nos quiere joder, cualquiera el anzuelo puede morder,
la violencia no siempre es visible y se puede tocar, a veces es recóndita o subliminal,
violencia al tacto a los sentidos, a mis orejas que tantas y tan mentiras han oído,
machocultura fuerza bruta, yo curvatura, la violación puede ocurrir en una cama, un carro,
puede ser un desconocido o el maridito querido, pero también en el aire que respiro,
en la historia que me han dado, despierta, esto no es caramelo de menta, la violación es mucho más que una experiencia personal, y si no entiendes lo que digo échate pa un lao y déjame actuar, tengo fe y sé que en algún momento esto va a cambiar, será en este siglo o en el otro,
mientras tanto las Krudas formando foco, alimentando tu alma engrandeciendo tu vida, sacándote del ostine y acere, echándote está súper que real pila, dolorosa, esta pila, coge: Quince millones en Afrika [sic] sin clítoris pa vivir, las cabezas negras sus rostros nunca pueden descubrir, en to' los países el 80, el 90 por ciento maltratadas hasta morir, en to's laos te meten pase !!
| Abused abusers, we’re not equal. Penetrated penetrators, we’re not equal. The women the men, we’re not equal. The Pale and the colored: Diversity. No, no, we’re not equal. Get away from the forced exit, get away from the danger of the street corner. No, no we’re not equal. Krudas, victory for the women. |
Appendix C: Glossary of Key Terms

**Hip-Hop**: *n.* a manifestation of the culture that is generally urban that includes rap, graffiti, art, fashion, and dance; a socio-cultural movement that originated in African American, Latin and Caribbean communities in the U.S. at the end of the 1960s becoming more prominent by the 1970s (Translation by author derived from definition provided by Martínez Cabrera).

**Rap**: *n.* a style of popular music of African American origin in which the words are recited rapidly and rhythmically over a prerecorded track that is typically electronic and instrumental. (New Oxford American Dictionary); the oral manifestation of hip-hop, a spoken song transmitted by a Master of Ceremonies (emcee/MC) that raps original rhymes (Translation by author of definition provided by Martínez Cabrera).
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