

Frederik, Laurie A. *Trumpets in the Mountains: Theater and the Politics of National Culture in Cuba*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012. 336 + xxii. Paperback \$25.95. ISBN: 9780822352655.

In this engaging study of the shifting sands of modern Cuban identity, Laurie A. Frederik transcends disciplinary divides by drawing on insights from the social sciences, anthropology, theater, and performance studies. This beautifully-crafted narrative blends ethnographic case studies of rural theater groups, candid accounts of the author's experiences in Cuba's most remote regions, and an analysis of the representations of *campesinos* (rural residents) in the national discourses about Cuban identity. Frederik pursues two intersecting lines of inquiry: the transforming representations of the *campesino* as a national icon utilized in shaping cultural consciousness, and the importance of community theater groups that perpetuate—and often surreptitiously dismantle—state-sanctioned notions of *cubanía* (Cubanness) and the ideal revolutionary citizen.

In her introductory chapter, Frederik describes how Cuban officials and professional artists responded to the ideological and economic crisis that erupted after the onset of the Special Period in 1989. In what Frederik terms a strategy of “preemptive nostalgia,” the Cuban state looked toward the image of the noble *campesino* as a source of cultural and moral purity and bastion of socialist values against the onset of globalization and consumerism, which were seen as threatening to reduce Cuba's cultural heritage to a folkloricized “pseudo-culture” (2). The government called upon Cuba's intellectuals and artists to rescue the lost voice of the *campesino* and disseminate revitalized revolutionary ideals.

In Chapter 1, Frederik maps the relationship between Cuban revolutionary ideology and theater and traces the development of Cuba's national characters from the racial stereotypes of nineteenth-century Teatro Bufo to the “raceless and classless” figure of the Hombre Nuevo that arose after 1959 (51). A new genre of political theater emerged that prioritized the collaborative creative process over the aesthetic product, incorporated ethnographic techniques (participant observation and interviews with community members) as part of the play-writing process, transforming rural residents from passive spectators into active participants in the construction of the performance. Teatro Nuevo groups such as Teatro Escambray pursued a twofold objective of bringing cultural awareness and socialist values to the farthest reaches of the island and introducing underrepresented rural voices into the national dialogue.

Chapter 2 discusses the challenges faced by artists working in peripheral zones during Cuba's Special Period and how harsh economic conditions altered definitions and representations of “authentic” *cubanía*. A new form of theater, Teatro Comunitario, perpetuated the ethnographic techniques of Teatro Nuevo, incorporating the experiences and testimonies of rural people in the play-making process. In the face of dwindling confidence in revolutionary values and *Opción Zero*—the possibility of absolute economic collapse—professional theater groups like Teatro de los Elementos left the stages of Havana for the remote Escambray Mountains to revive a sense of optimism and national pride by preserving the spiritual and cultural purity of the “true” *campesino* and the romanticized beauty of the Cuban countryside. The following two chapters theorize the unique process of collaborative and ethnographic play-making exemplified by Teatro de los Elementos and the distinctive challenges of making art in socialist Cuba. Expanding on the phases of Graham Wallis's cognitive model of creativity, Frederik reveals how the actors, writers and local informants negotiated the creation and interpretation of the final artistic product.

Chapter 5 takes the reader from the Escambray Mountains to those of Guantánamo Province to explore the world of artistic production in the farthest reaches of the island often overlooked by cultural institutions, intellectuals and critics. Emphasizing the acute tensions between city/countryside and center/periphery, Frederik explores the intimate relationship between political status and cultural authority in the context of rural theater during the Special Period. The author

follows a traveling community theater ensemble, La Cruzada Teatral Guantanamo-Baracoa, on a crusade to bring “culture” to the most isolated regions of the country and describes their struggle to secure cultural recognition in the eyes of both capital bureaucrats and rural lay audiences.

Echoing Gayatri Spivak’s groundbreaking proposal regarding the subaltern’s ability to speak, Chapter 6 scrutinizes the extent to which Cuban community theater achieves its goal of enabling rural residents to speak for themselves as discursive agents of their own storytelling. In her second case study, Frederik travels deep into the mountains of Guantánamo with Laboratorio de Teatro Comunitario, a professional theater initiative that sought to empower *campesinos* in representing their own stories on stage without mediation from the artists themselves. While the rural residents-turned-actors did in fact speak with their own words and voices, the framing and ultimate interpretation of the play—as an allegorical plea to rescue the disappearing culture of the “pure” *campesino*—remained in the hands of the *teatristas* (theater people). However, Frederik affirms that such projects encourage dynamic dialogue and “intense negotiation” (255) of collective identity between theater artists and rural residents who “will ultimately take control of their own historical representation” (258).

The concluding chapter examines the two contradictory faces of Cuban cultural identity: the exoticized “pseudo-culture” marketed to foreign tourists and the “authentic” culture shown to its citizens. In a final case study that reveals the schizophrenic desire to profit from Cuba’s cultural heritage while safeguarding it from outside influences, Frederik witnesses how Teatro de los Elementos drastically altered its repertoire in order to satisfy the expectations of European spectators. As Frederik concludes, Cuban cultural identity finds itself in a constant process of negotiation and transformation, and community theater groups play a crucial role in both constructing and tearing down the ideological frames within which *cubanía* is discursively represented and performed.

Throughout this text, Frederik uncovers the asymmetric dynamics of power and cultural authority that exist among the Cuban socialist state, urban intellectuals, community theater ensembles, and rural populations. Her sophisticated ethnographic analysis of the role of community theater in the construction of national culture in Cuba has broader implications for understanding the intersections of identity, power and art in the modern world. With relevance that extends from anthropology to performance studies and beyond, *Trumpets in the Mountains* represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the society, politics and cultural production of Cuba and Latin America.