The Report Committee for Carlos A. Davalos B.

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

STUDIES OF HYBRIDITY AND AGENCY IN MEXICAN

HIP-HOP

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:
_____

Robin D. Moore

_____

Charles D. Carson

Studies of Hybridity and Agency in Mexican Hip-hop

by

Carlos A. Davalos B., Licen.; M.Journalism

Report

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Abstract

Studies of Hybridity and Agency in Mexican hip-hop

Carlos A. Davalos B., M.Music

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Supervisor: Robin D. Moore

This essay proposes new paths for the analysis of hip-hop in Mexico, providing a brief history of its development and suggesting new ways of defining its local meanings and uses. The essay bases much of its analysis on notions of cultural hybridity as employed by Helena Simonett and Néstor García Canclini, and George Yúdice's concept of culture expediency. It frames the appropriation of rap music in Mexico as a form of cultural agency and self-empowerment on the part of marginal social groups. This is seen in many ways: through the integration of indigenous heritage and languages into performance, or musical elements derived from the northern border. It is also evident in the ways artists have occupied and converted abandoned buildings within Mexico City into concert venues or cultural spaces. Three different artists serve as my principal case studies: Mare Advertencia Lirika, Akil Ammar, and The Guadaloops. Although Mexican hip-hop is represented to an extent in existing scholarship, it remains less well documented than in many other Latin American countries. This document demonstrates the dynamic impact of hip-hop music culture on Mexican youth and advocates for its further study.

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INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, while walking with my family through the central plaza of Manzanillo, my grandfather's hometown on the northeast coast of Mexico, my father asked me anxiously what hip-hop was. Perhaps he had begun to recognize that my obsession with hip-hop since the early nineties was more than a passing fancy. I tried to formulate an answer that explained how studying hip-hop could help explain current political, social, and cultural trends among young people. In retrospect, I realize now that a constant part of my relationship with Mexican hip-hop, whether as a fan, a music journalist, or a graduate student has been explaining what it is to others and underscoring its social and artistic significance.

I pointed my father to a group of five teenagers break-dancing and performing freestyle rhymes in front of pastel-colored colonial buildings in downtown Manzanillo. The people standing around them, some of them passing tourists, constantly offered them cash tips. The teenagers used their moves and rhyming skills, along with a pair of heavy-duty speakers blasting classic US rap songs and Latin rhythms, as "tools" to give themselves a voice. In other words, hip-hop performance enabled the five artists to interact with and critique the urban environment where they lived. The five members of the group appeared proud of the crowd they had attracted. For a brief moment, they owned Manzanillo's central square. "That's hip-hop!" I told my father, noting how the teenagers were having fun while constructing a unique identity. They had appropriated a

public space by means of a global form of expression born in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods on the US East Coast.

Musical studies provide a means of observing local constructions of ideology. The present thesis report is no exception, as it examines the way youths construct identities. Although there is a vast scholarly literature dedicated to observe popular music in Mexico, only a handful of studies have focused on the appropriation of hip-hop culture. Yet they offer a fresh perspective on the lives of Mexican youth. Previous studies either focus solely on a specific geographical area of the country, almost always in the north (i.e., Monterrey, Sinaloa, or Tijuana), or only emphasize historical aspects of the reception of hip-hop in Mexico. My study, by contrast, considers how hip-hop helps generate social empowerment through the manipulation of technology and transnational cultural influences.

Hip-hop is a creative cultural manifestation that evolved in the New York boroughs of The Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn in the late seventies and early eighties. Conditions such as urban segregation and the marginalization of black and brown communities gave birth to the music and the ingenious use of domestic technologies (like turntables) and vernacular forms of rhetorical expression (rhymes). Pioneers of the genre used the spaces of an obsolete industrial infrastructure to discuss the material shortages and desire for social change in such communities. As Murray Forman notes, "street corners, basketball courts, subway trains, abandoned buildings, schools, and neighborhood nightclubs and dance halls were often the sites unseen where youths, alone or in groups, honed their skills, practicing and developing their craft" (2002, 67). Core

elements of hip-hop culture involve the use of rhymes or rapping,[1] dance, graffiti, or non-verbal sounds to communicate information about the contexts in which the art is being generated. These four elements combine within the public spaces where the performances take place. Tricia Rose, the first celebrated scholar to analyze hip-hop, saw how it gave "voice to the tensions and contradictions in the public urban landscape during a period of substantial transformation. Hip-hop attempted to seize the shifting urban terrain, to make it work on behalf of the dispossessed" (Rose 1994, 22).

In the introduction to their edited book on hip-hop, black culture, and globalization, Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle mention how in "thirty years since its inception, hip-hop's expressive cultures, language, music, sartorial styles, dance, and art have migrated across racial, ideological, and national boundaries to become one of the foremost forces in youth culture globally, (Basu and Lemelle 2006, 3)." Similarly, Tony Mitchell points out in his influential study of hip-hop outside the United States that "in most countries where rap music has taken root, local scenes have rapidly developed from an adoption to an adaption of US musical forms and idioms. This dynamic has involved an increasing syncretism and incorporation of local linguistic and musical features" (Mitchell 2001, 11). In Mexico, unique forms of hip-hop hybridization help us understand how territoriality—whether cultural, social, or political—can impact the genre. The use of *norteño* musical instruments or phrases, the incorporation of indigenous

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[1] As a point of clarification, rap music is located under the hip-hop culture umbrella. Following Keyes (2002, 1), I define rap as a "musical form that makes use of rhyme, rhythmic speech, and street vernacular, which is recited or loosely chanted over a musical soundtrack". In this paper, whether referring to graffiti writers, rappers, DJs, or break-dancers, I will use the terms "rappers" and "hip-hoppers" interchangeably.

languages or imagery, and the distinct urban subjects constructed around the particularities of cities or regions in Mexico, are just a few of the ways in which Mexico has indigenized hip-hop. Similarly, the incorporation of other local signifiers such as digitized samples from the bolero, *son jarocho*, or *banda* music combine with original digitized beats in the repertoire of young Mexicans.[2]

The rappers in Manzanillo chose to participate in globally connected cultural circuits by re-interpreting a black American form of expression. They employed call-and-response techniques so as to involve those around them; their knowledge of hip-hop classics from the US and popular hits from Mexico contributed to the soundtrack of their street performance, and their urban-tropical clothing (bright beach colors like red and yellow, baggy cuts), demonstrate their connection to the transnational template of hip-hop culture. One might suggest that "hip-hop today has assumed an increasingly significant role in shaping contemporary forms of young disenfranchisement across the world" (Perry 2012, 295).

The idea of an imagined global community where common codes of sonic and rhythmic language, composed under shared social conditions of working-class subjugation, is essential to Mexican hip-hop nomenclature. Duncan Brown, a scholar of English literature from South Africa, argues for a new form of transnational identification of this sort involving "a mutual implication in a history of difference, which

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[2] "Cuban Hip-hop all Stars: Transnationalism and the Politics of Representation," the fourth chapter in Geoff Baker's *Buena Vista in the Club. Rap, Reggaetón, and Revolution in Havana* (Duke University Press 2011), discusses the assumption among many scholars that localized hip-hop represents particular populations better than generic hip-hop styles mimicking US artists. Baker suggests that this view may not always be accurate, at least in the Cuban context. However, in the case of Mexico I would agree with others that localized expression resonates more strongly with listeners.

acknowledges local as well as global affiliations (2001, 758)." Brown's notion of global community is useful as a means of understanding the hip-hop community, "a multilingual, multiethnic 'nation' with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present" (Alim 2009, 3). This community makes it possible for members to explore opportunities beyond the geographical confines of their physical location. With the internet and all the digital tools it provides, hip-hop has evolved into a global network. It is indisputable that it has become one of the most penetrating popular art movements of the last 35 years, and Mexico has not escaped its influence.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEXICAN HIP-HOP

How did Mexican hip-hoppers first enter into the global hip-hop dialogue? The movement began as a means of expressing traditional narratives of local experience by means of American music influences. Most performers in the 1990s were amateurs; credit goes to the northern group Control Machete for releasing what is now considered the first Mexican hip-hop record. Produced by the Latino branch of Universal Records in 1997, the *Mucho Barato…* (Much Cheapness…) album demonstrated that a uniquely Mexican hip-hop hybrid was possible. With samples of Mexican movie soundtracks, *corrido* and *norteño* music, plus a very smart and socially engaged lyrical commentary using local slang terms from Monterrey, this now-classic collection of 18 tracks proved influential on subsequent hip-hop artists.

Before the arrival of the internet, the influences on Mexican hip-hop came from the US–Mexico border zone in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Migration and informal cultural exchanges through Mexican tourism to the US helped disseminate such influences. American groups from Latino communities in California like Cypress Hill, The Psycho Realm, or The Mexakinz, and performers like Mellow Man Ace or Kid Frost, slowly gained a fan base in Mexico. They helped establish a paradigm adopted subsequently by Mexican nationals. From the South Gate area of Los Angeles, "Cypress Hill's first producer Jason Roberts worked on the two albums that Control Machete released, which both sold millions of copies" (Dávalos, 2011).

As of the early 2000s, mainstream US musical influence impacted Mexico more consistently via the internet, as did the Afro-centric consciousness prominent in American hip-hop . In this way, the Native Tongues collective (A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, Jungle Brothers, etc.) and hip-hop artists from Madrid, Seville, and Barcelona all had a decisive impact on young Mexicans. Digital online resources like mp3 downloads, P2P file sharing and music-streaming platforms on social media became essential in the evolution and understanding of Mexican hip-hop.

Today, Mexican hip-hop serves as artistic testimony of how "global process and events transform local contexts and the way in which culture is experienced and imagined" (Christopher Dennis 2012, 14). It is safe to say that Mexican hip-hop has been transformed into a very rich scene in the twenty years since the release of Control Machete's first record. Styles and influences now vary tremendously. They range from artists influenced by Latin rhythms such reggaeton or Atlanta's Trap to abstract-beat

production, the use of traditional boom-bap beat patterns, and innovative hip-hop creations in indigenous communities. An example of such local creativity is rapper Pat Boy's fusion of Tzotzil or Maya languages with traditional hip-hop beats.[3] Mexican lyrics and rhyming patterns are also incredibly diverse: while the rapid-fire mind of Aguascalientes' Mike Díaz engenders a surrealistic storyteller comparable to New York City's MF Doom, Guadalajara's C-Kan demonstrates how gangsters and *cholos* are also romantic beings. Hip-hop groups and collectives like La Vieja Guardia Crew, Colectivo Mujeres Trabajando, The Guadaloops, Los Caballeros del Plan G, and La Banda Bastön, keep Mexico's hip-hop growing organically.[4] "Global hip-hop practices," as Tony Mitchell points out, "become the vehicles for reconstructing the roots of local histories" (Mitchell 2001, 32). As a global form of culture, hip-hop allows Mexican artists to incorporate transnational musical elements of "convergence and multiple origins" (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, 29) into their artistic projects.

By examining the music and community actions of three Mexican hip-hop performers—The Guadaloops, Mare Advertencia Lirika, and Akil Ammar—this study aims to demonstrate how Mexican hip-hop has been a trustworthy megaphone to amplify young urban voices. I analyze the indigenization of rap music as a case of a hybrid culture with regional and global transcendence, and I demonstrate how hip-hop provides

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[3] Pat Boy "U Kúux Ta ´Al Mayaoob" (Vidas Mayas), from the record *Soy Máasewal*. Independent release in 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRLIAqxjOHc

[4] La Vieja Guardia Crew – Primero Mi Familia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pf1uxC4MdEg
Mujeres Trabajando – Cypher Effect: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0VFPFrHXDQ
La Banda Bastön – Me Gustas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpe1kpVc40M
Caballeros del Plan G – Digan lo que Digan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-uycUIremw

a useful lens through which to observe patterns of social interaction and identity construction.

Second, this essay examines the ways in which artists claim urban space. In his 2007 book, Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar examines how the appropriation of urban spaces within US cities became a source of empowerment for American rappers (Ogbar 2007, 7). Just as in the case of artists from "New York City's Marcy and Queensbridge public-housing projects, the Magnolia projects in New Orleans, Houston's Fifth Ward, Miami-Dade's Carol City, and Compton near Los Angeles" (Ogbar 2007, 7), geographical demarcations in the Mexico City metropolitan areas like Tlatelolco, Culhuacán, Ecatepec, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, as well as Cerro de la Silla and Parque Fundidoras in Monterrey, or the Cuauhtémoc zone and the La Cancha 98 neighborhood in Guadalajara are central to Mexican hip-hop songs and imagery. By rooting such expression in urban poverty, they provide credibility and networks of subaltern affiliation.

The penultimate section of this work considers the growth of the Mexican hip-hop culture industry. The country's extraordinary transition to a hip-hop producer derives from factors including the technological awakening of Mexican rappers, the emergence of small, independent business entrepreneurs, their partnering with alternative media outlets, and Mexico's proximity to the United States. Access to professional recording studios and producers from the US has helped the hip-hop scene grow exponentially during the past decade. Monterrey's Niña Dioz, for example, recently invited Detroit beat-maker Shigeto to produce her latest single, something that geographical proximity facilitated.

The final section of this report dissects the few scholarly studies solely dedicated exclusively to Mexican hip-hop, noting that both Mexican and US academia have in large part overlooked the scene. The lack of such scholarship suggests number of future research possibilities. A focus on appropriation and identity construction represent unexplored areas, for instance. The final section proposes avenues of research along these lines that could allow the young field of Mexican hip-hop studies to expand and document its social impact among young enthusiasts.

HYBRIDITY AND IDEOLOGY IN MEXICAN HIP-HOP

Hybridity, understood as the result of combining two dissimilar components in a variety of contexts, has been used extensively to explain how two different races, languages, or cultures give birth to new ones (Pacini Hernández 2010). In this study, the notion of hybridity helps explain how territoriality and language assist in the indigenization of foreign cultural templates. The intersection of certain North American hip-hop cultures (principally Chicano and West Coast hip-hop) with influential Spanish rap and a rich local culture combines in unique ways. By observing how Mexican artists creatively blend their influences, we can use it as a musical means of understanding the contemporary urban experience.

Building on Helena Simonett's (2011) study of Sinaloan rap as a manifestation of the *glocal*,[5] this section examines the music of The Guadaloops and the artistic and social strategies of Mare Advertencia Lirika to portray Mexican hip-hop as a unique *territorio sonoro*. The musical composition, production, and performance styles of these two artists give voice to local experiences using a trans-cultural aesthetic. Rather than resisting ongoing global flows of culture, Mexican rappers embrace them and frequently transform them. C-Kan from Guadalajara, for instance, grew up listening to Control Machete and Cártel de Santa, both from Monterrey. His appearance was influenced by the *cholo* aesthetic of Californian hip-hop groups like Cypress Hill, Delinquent Habits, The Mexakinz, and Kid Frost. Using the *gangsta rap* sub-genre, C-Kan fashioned a romantic

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5 Ignacio Corona defines glocal as the "cultural production aligned with renewed interest in regional culture and unprecedented construction of regional cultural identity as "glocal": both global and local" (279).

stage persona known as the "cholo enamorado" (*cholo* in love) who speaks about love in the *barrio* and also the immediate context of his Cuauhtémoc Neighborhood in Guadalajara. Now, after making his music public solely through YouTube, C-Kan's songs have received millions of visits. He has recently received coverage from mainstream spaces like *The Source* magazine and B-Real's Greenboox interview series. His collaborators range from the social conscious Puerto Rican reggaeton artist El Joey to Dominican Lápiz Consciente, as well as Sinful, an original member of the iconic Chicano rap group The Mexakinz' from Los Angeles. C-Kan's distinctive style of pronunciation and narrative style has influenced his music. As Shonekan states, "the spread of hip-hop has generated exciting tentacles of hybridity that have encroached on, but not always subverted, existing traditions, art forms, and cultural mores" (2012, 147).

HYBRIDITY IN THE MUSIC OF THE GUADALOOPS

The Guadaloops' repertoire has been described as a "neo-Mexican music salad." It is based on hip-hop beats that are performed instrumentally, not sampled; the backtracks are inspired by pop-rock arrangements Texas *conjunto,* soul, British drum 'n' bass, and other music. They have two vocalists, one who sings simple melodies and choruses while the other fires off rap lines comparable to any other hardcore hip-hop act. Their name, The Guadaloops, is an Anglicism based on one of the most iconic Mexican names—Guadalupe—and the word "loops," the term used to describe a rhythmic pattern composed of repeated sound phrases. The band name illustrates their eclectic/syncretic nature. While two of the group's members were born and raised in northern Mexico near

the border, the third was born in Mexico City. Guadaloops' lyrics incorporate both English and Spanish, and their musical compositions blend elements from Mexican regional musics with genres picked from both the U.S.–Mexico border zone and other countries. Some music blogs have defined the Guadeloops' style as related to "indy rock" because of the soft electric guitars employed and the construction of musical phrases around the vocalist's melodic textures, yet the music foregrounds rhymed raps as well. Franco, also known as Tino el Pingüino, the rapper, has a distinctive style of rhyming using a high-pitched, nasal vocal timbre, one of the first thing listeners recognize when hearing a Guadaloops song.

Néstor García Canclini, a prominent cultural studies researcher in Latin America, sees a positive, multi-layered reciprocity between figurative codes or global forms of creative expression and local, material forces like the bureaucracy of government institutions or paternalistic regimes. "The trans-nationalization culture brought about by communication technologies, their reach, and their efficacy are better appreciated as part of the re-composition of urban cultures, along with the migrations and tourism that soften national borders and redefine the concepts of people, nation, and identity" (García Canclini 1995, 10). The Guadaloops' music is an example of such urban cultural recomposition. Their pieces demonstrate how globalization can have positive effects and result in new, dynamic cultural products. Los Guadaloops' unique form of cultural expression is not defined by territorial boundaries (Simonett 2011, 129).

The Guadaloops' piece "Coral Neón," for example, is an almost eight-minute-long song in which subtle arrangements using rhythmic horns are at the forefront for the first

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three minutes, followed by a British drum 'n' bass electronic section that drives to a climax over the next two minutes. After this the piece finally fades out to the accompaniment of a subtle hip-hop beat that overlaps with the same horns used at the beginning. Instruments employed in the song include guitar, synthesizer, and bass drum at the beginning, followed by the vocal. And there's a melody sung before the rhythm breaks down into the short rapped part. Also, congas, timbales, and other percussion take over at a certain point under the horn section. In the last third of the song, vocalist Fermín Sánchez repeats the phrase "*de color neón*" over and over, harmonizing with himself, to create a melodic loop that interacts with the percussion and horn patterns.

In comparison, their song "Neolsticio" repeats the formula of looped melodies while Tino raps phrases derived from northern Mexico like "*andamos pilas*" (we are active, we're getting our act together). In this way, the group fuses Mexican elements with reggaeton beats and bass patterns referencing British dubstep. The result a highly percussive and driving song, and the rapping is also very rhythmic and powerful during the first minute and a half. It is only thereafter that the sung vocal enters, contrasting the staccato rapping with a much more legato melody and romantic lyrics. The use of accordion in "Decapitación," the last song of their 2014 album *De locos y Monstruos,* also includes *norteño* influences.

There are many ways to produce, distribute, perform, and sell rap music nowadays, but two approaches stand out. First, there is the corporate path, which is a long-shot option for Mexican hip-hop artists because they don't generate enough financial revenue yet to interest large businesses. Second, there is the grassroots, independent

circuit. The Guadaloops have taken the second path, that of the independent music scene. Local musicians, art collectives, and other bands have provided them with recording studios, production advice, independent publicity, and networks for the promotion of their music. The production of their last release, for example, was a result of collaborations with Mexican and Mexican-American bands in Mexico and southern Texas. Previous collaborations with Grupo Fantasma, the multi-Latin funk group from Austin, opened the door for The Guadaloops to record in a formal recording studio after performing at the SXSW festival in 2017.

HYBRIDITY IN THE MUSIC OF MARE ADVERTENCIA LIRIKA

The artistic trademarks of hip-hop artist Mare Advertencia Lirika are lyrics that reference her Zapotec indigenous heritage and strong feminist, gender-rights orientation. She too appropriates hip-hop as a form of artistic empowerment and demonstrates how indigenous groups in Mexico "have had to inform themselves about the most advanced scientific and technological discoveries in order to develop their own positions" (García Canclini 1990. Translation 1995, 172). Although the number of young indigenous rappers in Mexico is growing (i.e., Baduba Sendú, Mixe Represent, Zara Monroy) and California (i.e., Una Isu[6]), Mare Advertencia Lirika is definitively the most active voice in this subgenre. Her music has taken her around the continent, from Chicago to Chile, and the strength of her social messages has positioned her as a vocal human rights champion inside Mexico.

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[6] Una Isu – Mixteco es un Lenguaje: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzUyQ7wlUf4.

Helena Simonett's study of rap in Sinaloa is helpful when considering questions of identity in the music of Mare Advertencia Lirika. Simonett suggests that hip-hopper Javier Pérez (aka Elote El Bárbaro) and his Yoremensemble Project represent a case of bi-cultural hybridity. By mixing hip-hop with musical influences derived from the Yoreme indigenous group, the Yoremeensemble Project "was conceived of as bringing the two worlds of cosmopolitan and indigenous music together" (Simonett 2011, 142). Simonett concludes that Pérez identifies "with 'the Indian in himself'." Because the Other is constitutive of one's own identity, by rapping in both first and third person she suggests Pérez conceives himself in terms of the Other (that is, the Yoreme indigenous community) and thus blurs the difference between the Self and the Other" (141). In the end, Simonett concludes, the project "modernizes" the Yoreme yet fails to create "a true musical fusion" (142).

In a similar way, Mare Advertencia Lirika herself embodies both modern and traditional cultural manifestations; she personifies indigeneity and a cosmopolitan hip-hop aesthetic simultaneously. I suggest that since she is from a Zapotec family and has adopted a transnational culture frame, the dichotomy between the Self and the Other is less relevant in her case.[7] The complex relation between "indigenous" and "urban," "authentic" and "fake," "emic" and "etic" that prevented the musicians in Simonett's case study from creating an original product are not as evident in Mare's music. Her Zapotec identity "found a voice in rap to address issues of immediate social relevance" (Simonett 2011, 135). Mare Advertencia Lirika's hip-hop project resists the idea that "integrated

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[7] See Mare Advertencia Lirika, "¿Y tú qué esperas?": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEs7Okf0SPc.

into the economic processes of economic modernization, indigenous people in many ways are victims of a cultural modernity that appropriates indigenous cultural expressions to define itself (Simonett, 2011, 144)." Her eclectic musical persona is challenging because she performs a Zapotec identity by manipulating hip-hop's cosmopolitan nature. Mare's resistance to the asymmetric relations of gender and ethnicity in Mexico have helped her establish an international persona.

Mare notes, "My family is migrant. My mother and her family grew up in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl [one of Mexico City's boroughs]. When they went back to Oaxaca they didn't go to their Zapotec community, instead they went to the state's capital city, where I was born. My grandmother suffered linguistic discrimination and that is why she learned Spanish. For my family, at some point, leaving behind Zapotec identity was a survival strategy in a class-stratified society" (author interview, March 22, 2017). Even though her family was forced to deny its Zapotec heritage and adopt a foreign city and language (Spanish) to survive, Mare creatively adopted another international language, hip-hop, to reclaim indigeneity.

In a recent interview, Mare explained the place of hip-hop in her work: "I believe that hip-hop is universal. When I first came in contact with graffiti and rap, it wasn't through United States hip-hop, rather it was by seeing how people in Mexico had already adapted it" (author interview, March 22, 2017). She also accentuated the fact that her lyrics are multi-layered narratives created by learning from others' experiences and sharing her own. Mare is always in dialogue with whomever is in front of her—hip-hop audiences, groups of children, university students, migrant communities, government

officials. "Hip-hop's global nature helps me hear and learn from experiences people have shared with me in other places. At the same time, some people identify with the experiences I share- I don't think communication is unilateral. So, I organize my workshops around different topics, but keeping two central things in mind: there has to be practical/artistic learning, like the structuring of a hip-hop rhyme, the composition of a hip-hop beat, or the manipulation of turntables, and at the same time I also try to create constructive life experiences [*aprendizaje de vida*]. The topics vary; I touch on issues of identity, gender, memory, cultural self-defense, etc. I work primarily with women, teenagers, and children. I also share stories of my rap career, teach rapping and rhyme writing, vocal experimentation, and discuss woman's autonomy" (author interview, March 22, 2017).

Mare Advertencia Lirika's career has been shaped by the multiplicity of cultures in her native Oaxaca, migration, and perspectives absorbed from the places she has visited. "While in the United States, I found a strong reaffirmation of Mixtec identity in the migrant communities I visited. Contact with them made me reflect on my own (Zapotec) identity, which is part of Oaxaca's multiculturalism. With the Mapuche people in Chile, for example, I questioned the importance of rescuing indigenous languages as a form of territorial resistance. That is why now I'm trying to rescue my own language. [While on tour] in Ecuador, when I was invited to promote my music and give a concert, I encountered progressive public policies in the area of sexual and gender identity, something that Mexico is terribly behind the times. Not even the people I have met in Mexico's feminist movement, including myself, have reflected on such things."

In Mare's song "Bienvenidx," she points to asymmetric power dynamics that resemble patterns of colonization. The lyrics speak about migration and marginality, concluding with a spoken verse about capitalism in Mexico and an invitation to resist it:

Tercermundista marginada por herencia,
nacida al sur del norte donde el sueño comienza,
tener paciencia, no es opción cuando se espera
el progreso que a mi gente, hace tiempo le prometieran.
Sigo buscando el bienestar y no lo veo,
solo veo las huellas de la explotación y el saqueo.
El desempleo crece a diario y no es mentira
que los de abajo somos quienes estamos en la mira.

Third-world citizen marginalized by inheritance,
born in the south of the north where the dream begins,
having patience is not an option when awaiting progress
that was long promised to my people.
I'm still looking for well-being but I don't see it,
I only see the effects of exploitation and plunder.
Unemployment grows every day, this is no lie,
Those at the bottom are in the crosshairs.

Sean bienvenidos, sean bienvenidas a este infierno,
llamado sistema económico capitalista, neoliberal, a este heteropatriarcado.
Pero tenemos la opción de apagar las llamas y construir nuestro propio paraíso,
pero para eso primero hay que tener las ganas de hacerlo y empezar, empezar ahora.

Women and men, welcome to this hell called a neoliberal, capitalist economic system
welcome to this heteropatriarchy.
We have the option of putting out the flames and building our own paradise,
but first we have to have the will to do it, and starting, starting now.

Songs like "Bienvenidx" (Welcome) and others like "Vivas y Libres," (Alive and Free) "Qué Mujer," (What a Woman) "Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista)," (Uncomfortable Feminist Manifesto) or "Devuélvemelas," (Give Them Back) are similarly illustrative of gender activism and local resistance. In an interview with a major news outlet in Mexico, Mare declared that hip-hop "helped her to empower herself as a

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woman." It gave her a language, helped her change and finally reinvent herself (*Animal Político*, January 9, 2015). The dynamics of transnational creation and collaboration—local, Latin regional, and global—prove the existence of an extraordinary hip-hop hybrid in Mexico.

CLAIMING URBAN SPACE IN MEXICO CITY

One Saturday evening in northern Mexico City, young Mexicans from all over the country gathered outside the Centro de Convenciones Tlatelolco auditorium to see the famous Spanish rapper Nach Scratch perform. It was May 2007 and an unprecedented occasion for everyone. Finally, a well-known international rap artist was about to appear in front of thousands of young Mexicans; they knew his music without having ever heard it broadcast on mainstream radio stations or sold in established record stores. The event was something that concert organizers had never seen before. People from all over the country came to Mexico City to take part. The names and faces of Spanish and U.S. hip-hop legends were stamped on almost every t-shirt worn that evening: 7 Notas 7 Colores, 2-Pac, Los Violadores del Verso, The Notorious B.I.G., SFDK, Naughty by Nature, Frank-T, Cypress Hill, Tote King, the Wu-Tang Clan, and many others. An endless sea of baseball caps, beanies, basketball shoes, Timberland boots, backpacks, and other hip-hop paraphernalia filled the venue.

The run-down Centro de Convenciones Tlatelolco suggested the limited resources used to organize the event: low-cost paper tickets, friends helping work the entrance, the cheapest *caguamas* (a Mexican version of the 40-oz. beer bottle) being consumed by visitors, portable toilets, and modest t-shirts hanging up for sale. Light-colored deteriorated tiles covered what had probably been an attractive lobby entrance some decades before. In the main hall, among clouds of white smoke, teenage rappers

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improvised rhymes or cyphers.[8] The excitement was palpable. As Nach and Arma Blanca, the opening act, finally took the stage, the audience roared. The crowd sang all the lyrics that the Iberian artists performed, to his (Nach's) amazement.

With his team of volunteers and friends, Jonatan Rojas, the event's sole organizer, undertook a form of underground event production; it proved to young Mexicans that hip-hop could be used to claim urban spaces. Hip-hop is often used as vehicle to claim parts of the city that local government officials, hipster venue circuits, and profit-oriented media platforms never pay attention to. During the performance described above, the Centro de Convenciones Tlatelolco became an urban focal point. Events such as the one described above suggest how marginal spaces can be the center of cultural movements.

When Mexico City rappers claim city peripheries, they become artistic and lyrical messengers for those areas. In most cases they are promote themselves independently in the process, as lack of public recognition "led hip-hop enthusiasts in Mexico to explore alternative venues for disseminating the genre" (Tickner 2008, 132). Mexico City's urban underground has become the root of Mexican hip-hoppers' identity. Impoverished suburbs and working-class areas have become foundational elements for disenfranchised *capitalinos*. They promote grassroots action. It is thus in disenfranchised areas where hip-hop enthusiasts reformulate new categories and definitions of Mexico City. In keeping with Derek Pardue's understanding of urban *periferia* as both space and ideology in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, local Mexico City rappers restructure the city through a

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8 Anything cyclical. If you are freestyling, you rap in a cypher (one after the other). Interrupting another artist will break his/her cypher (unless he's next in line and the person behind him is ending).

deliberate claim of "occupation" (Pardue 2010, 49). Similar to the case of hip-hop in Havana, the valorization of the "underground" in Mexico City hip-hop "points towards a positive resignification of marginalization" (Baker 2006, 242). Peripheral areas like Naucalpan, Ecatepec, Cuautitlan Izcalli, Iztapalapa, and Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl are bastions of Mexican hip-hop.

Well off the tourist route, a majority of Mexico City hip-hoppers come from densely populated sections of the city characterized by high crime rates, limited access to basic services, inadequate law enforcement, and general impoverishment. Yet they feel proud of their neighborhoods and continually reaffirm this through lyrics, graffiti, and other artistic manifestations. Through concerts, workshops, and tours, performers imbue urban places with a new positive meaning and transform them into a source of inspiration. As in other Latin American cities, rappers' emphasis on local neighborhoods brings them into public consciousness. "Performing rap satisfies their desires to have their localities acknowledged, recognized and celebrated" (Dennis 2008, 193).

Apart from Jonatan Rojas's (aka Akil Ammar[9]) entrepreneurial activities, discussed above, his performances suggest how rappers successfully claim urban space. Following the example of foundational Mexican hip-hop group Control Machete, Ammar regularly uses his neighborhood for as inspiration in video productions, and/or for the planning of events. By doing so, he not only puts his native Colonia Obrera in the minds

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[9] The artist explains his choice of a stage name: "It is Arab, and I chose the name because I liked its phonetics and meaning (Akil: he who uses his reason, Ammar: idea constructor). I was using my real name's initials JR (Jonatan Rojas), but I didn't like that a lot of people just thought it meant JUNIOR" (author interview, April 12, 2017).

of hip-hop enthusiasts, but inspires others to do the same. "Mi Barrio," the opening track of *Deja Vú*, Ammar's second studio album, vividly captures his neighborhood devotion. In it, he recognizes the difficulties of living in his neighborhood, but he also declares his spatial allegiance to it.

Triste sí, así es mi barrio
Impredecible sí, así es mi barrio
Pero es el lugar donde quiero estar
Cuando vivo con los míos nada me puede tocar

Es en el barrio donde todo pasa
Pero es el barrio el lugar al que llamo casa
Aquí muere todo menos la esperanza
Miramos al futuro con confianza

My neighborhood is sad
My neighborhood is unpredictable
But it is the place where I want to be
When I live with my people nothing can touch me

It is in the neighborhood where everything happens
But the neighborhood is the place that I call home
Here everything dies except hope
We see the future with confidence/trust

Mexican hip-hop frames urban and political resistance through music lyrics and also serves as an artistic vehicle to understand geographic and class divisions in the city. In his study, Geoff Baker defines Cuban hip-hop as a "tool for documenting new spatial conditions and observing the widening gap between image and reality in Havana" (2006, 242). His comments speak directly to the ways Mexican hip-hopers describe class boundaries. In the same song discussed above, Ammar explicitly articulates such class differences:

Aquí no hay lugar para el hijo de papi millonario
No residencias, no mansiones
Solo apartamentos con un baño y dos habitaciones
Aquí valemos más por la experiencia que por posesiones
Y sobrevivimos a estas calles gracias a correctas decisiones

Here, there is no place for a rich daddy's boy
There are no large houses or mansions
Only two-bedroom apartments with a single bathroom
Here, we are valued for our experiences and not our possessions
And we survive these streets based on wise decisions

Hip-hop's origins in New York are masterfully described in song by South Bronx and Brooklyn pioneers like Grandmaster Flash, The Furious Five, and The Sugarhill Gang. They chronicle marginal urban situations and the fraught relationships between race and space. Mexican artists like Akil Ammar have replicated this same dynamic in Latin America. The manifestations of hip-hop in Cuba and Brazil are similar to that of hip-hop in the South Bronx in the sense that performers use music to negotiate and comment upon place. Mexican hip-hop is somewhat different in that artists tend to narrate how class and economic inequality, not race, have been the primary source of urban disfranchisement. By means of rapping, graffiti, break-dancing, turntablism, and entrepreneurial initiatives, exponents in Mexico City configure creative messages in which they reimagine urban life. Tickner similarly recognizes the power hip-hop to represent "daily concerns about its practitioners, which also re-signify the streets and neighborhoods where they perform" (2008, 121).

As with Tickner's notions of spaciality, Derek Pardue's notion of marginality rests on the power of being a witness (Pardue 2010, 55). Pardue sees hip-hop's insurgency as a result of the coherence of urban marginality, permitting all residents an urban area to

redefine themselves "vis-à-vis the city and also the power of periphery" (Pardue 2010, 57). In contrast, the coherence of marginality discovered by Mexican hip-hoppers involves the generation of a suburban counter-nature, an insurgent manifestation that challenges Mexico City's stability as well as injecting authority and power into peripheral narratives.

MEXICAN HIP-HOP AND AGENCY

In backstage conversations after the Nach Scratch show, staff and organizers commented on how impressive it was to see such a large public turnout without any mass media promotion. Every fan present that night had accessed the music performed at the show through P2P[10] platforms, free social networks, or pirate CD stalls outside subway stations and street markets. The event was the first of its kind: the hip-hop community had organized it themselves. It took place in a building that had never before been used for such purposes and inspired a massive turnout with no traditional sponsors. Through the use of social-media, word-of-mouth communication, and paper flyers, Rojas demonstrated the power and independence of the hip-hop community.

NEW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Adam Haupt's work on South African hip-hop is useful in illustrating how technology can be an ally of disenfranchised hip-hop artists. Haupt observes how online platforms have "allowed . . . users to swap music files on a peer-to-peer basis. End users could communicate with other internet surfers in their attempt to acquire or share new music files" (Haupt 2008, 83) … [S]ound streaming and music file sharing permitted by new digital technology is a new form of agency for music listeners and artists. Hip-hop music fans in Mexico or anywhere else in the world are "able to bypass conventional

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10 In a P2P network, the "peers" are computer systems which are connected to each other via the Internet. Files can be shared directly between systems on the network without the need of a central server. In other words, each computer on a P2P network becomes a file server as well as a client.

retail outlets and access only those songs on specific albums that they preferred. Music fans therefore engage directly with one another, unmediated by corporations" (84).

Rojas's/Ammar's hip-hop artistry depends on community ties, social media, and open-source studio equipment and tools to produce and distribute his music. With seven albums out and a solid reputation, he has generated a fan base that mobilizes solely on the basis of information posted on the artist's online spaces (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). His music circulates because of the possibilities provided by new digital technologies. Like many other artists around the world without a relationship to record labels, Ammar was never part of the corporate music industry. For him, being part of the MP3 revolution provided a way to bypass major record labels and reach audiences (Haupt 2008, 84). Both the concert organizing and Ammar's music are thus facilitated by digital technology and transnational collaboration. Ammar's music, shaped by "differently structured fields of national and regional forces," functions as a form of global trade and activism (Yúdice 2004, 4)."

GEORGE YÚDICE'S CONCEPT OF EXPEDIENCY

George Yúdice's influential work on the uses of culture as a social and political tool offer a useful framework with which to analyze the social and political agency generated by Jonatan Rojas. Yúdice's analysis of how rap, funk, and other musics with black roots serve to "contest the place of black people in Brazil and their access to privatized public space (Yúdice 2004, 6)," has an equivalent function in Mexico. Hip-hop culture there questions the places that disenfranchised youth have in public space. It

works as an "open-ended network" (Yúdice 2004, 109) in the sense that it is constantly evolving. The youth challenge ownership of city space by the middle classes, claiming it as their own. "Through new, nontraditional musics such as funk and rap, they seek to establish new forms of identity" (Yúdice 2004, 114). Like funk in Brazil, the use of hip-hop for some young Mexicans is a way to generate political statements by "permeating space using style and ethos (Yúdice 2004, 130)." As opposed to Yúdice's research in which Afro-Brazilian youth appropriate urban spaces associated with higher social classes, Mexican rappers focus their creative and artistic actions on marginal city regions. It is not in the interest of Mexican youths to claim spaces usually related to other economic classes. Rather, they use music where they live.

Rojas' interactions with his neighborhood friends and acquaintances in Tlatelolco or Colonia Guerrero, and the integration of transnational talent through events or album collaborations, accentuates the essence of Mexican hip-hop. Throughout his artistic and business endeavors, Rojas "comprises a deliberate, concentrated, and often spontaneous array of spatial practices and spatial discourses that are both constituted by and constitutive of the spaces and places" (Murray 2002, 42) where he lives.

In working with international collaborators in the Natch Scratch concert, Rojas actively used the transatlantic, cultural connections existing within the hip-hop community. He employed the "new international division of cultural labor provided by hip-hop. This division imbricates local difference with transnational administration and investment" (Yúdice 2003, 4). Such alliances link local venues, like an empty public building, to transnational artistic scenes. Rojas' efforts insert Mexican hip-hop into a

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global circuit that operates without any assistance from governments or businesses. This technological infrastructure enable "services and independent producers to be located almost anywhere on earth" (Yúdice 2004, 19).

Haupt notes that "the efforts of hip-hop artists have made a significant contribution in constructing public spaces in which historically marginalized youth can express themselves and engage critically with their realities" (2008, xxii). Simultaneously, Rojas's initiatives demonstrate how "hip-hop has become a global signifying practice providing new parameters of meaning to locally and/or nationally diverse social groups" (Christopher Dennis 2008, 185). Similar to other places around the world where rappers "express a sense of belonging to a global subculture" (Mitchell 2001, 33), young Mexican hip-hoppers refashion and challenge local contexts by participating in global trends. In other words, they draw upon the full range of options provided by the "global hip-hop nation." This group is defined by Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook (2009, 3), as a "multilingual, multiethnic nation with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present."

Transnational networks are powerful tools that artists use to communicate political tactics and demand attention in determined contexts; they also serve as a means of receiving information regarding social and artistic organizing or music recording, lyric writing, or beat production. The networks help practitioners share information about local realities or to transmit detailed personal experiences to other latitudes. Jonatan Rojas generates the conditions to connect with international talent and also have his own songs

distributed transnationally. Collaborators on his albums come from other countries, reflecting the networking activity he has engaged in. Transnational activity of this nature is possible only through advances in communication technology.

MEXICAN ACADEMIA AND HIP-HOP

The emergence of a vibrant Mexican hip-hop scene has in large part been overlooked by both Mexican and US academia. The few rigorous analyses of the music to date have only considered basic textual and lyrical issues. And although some US scholars (Kun 2004; Tickner 2008; Simonett 2011) have discussed certain aspects of rap in Mexico, Mexican hip-hop provides an opportunity to study an emergent form of hybrid expression for scholars on both sides of the border. This section provides a brief review of Mexican hip-hop articles in American academia and also touches on publications in Mexico. It goes on to propose new avenues of research. As a cultural manifestation evident in many Latin American urban centers, hip-hop provides a useful lens through which to observe distinctive patterns of social mobility, interaction, interpretation, and identity construction.

Arlene B. Tickner wrote "Aquí en el Ghetto: Hip-hop in Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico" in 2008. Although it traces hip-hop's production from the urban ghettos of New York to Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico, it serves mostly as a basic introduction and overview. Tickner correctly recounts how in Mexico hip-hop never got attention from the music industry. She mentions the Monterrey-based group Control Machete as one of the first to experience "national and international fame, without packaging their music for the global market" (132). She continues by stressing that the group's lack of commercial ties "allowed Control Machete to uphold progressive rap's commitment to reality and authenticity and to explore a great number of local themes in its lyrics and rhythms" (132). This separation between industry and music has provided Mexican hip-hoppers

with the independence to manufacture their own artistic signifiers. It has led to a relatively free space for young people to initiate fresh discourses, identities, aesthetics, styles, and forms of production.

Comparably, Josh Kun's piece "What Is an MC If He Can't Rap to Banda? Making Music in Nuevo L.A." takes an interesting approach to the reformulation of Mexican identity in the United States. Kun centers his analysis on "No Hay Manera," the signature song of Akwid, a Michoacán-born, L.A.-bred hip-hop/ranchera group. Kun describes the song as "rapped in Spanish over samples of Mexican banda music mixed with West Coast hip-hop beats" (742). Through the cultural intersections generated by the song, Kun explores how the globality of hip-hop "depends upon multiple localities— its creation, production, and reception within local and translocal sites such as Los Angeles. Hip-hop is not just popular among latinos; hip-hop is a music of and by Latinos, music they make as well as consume, music they customize and reinvent according to their own rules and styles" (743). Building on George Sánchez's notions of ethnicity, Kun connects Akwid's music with the migrant experience in the United States by supporting the idea that "ethnicity was not a fixed set of customs growing from life in Mexico, but rather a collective identity that emerged from daily experience in the US" (744). Consequently, "No Hay Manera" serves as a rich site for the negotiation of identity and culture, one in which Michoacán becomes an abstract and de-territorialized concept employed in Los Angeles.

Amanda Maria Morrison touches on the relationship between *narcocorridos* and gangsta rap in her 2008 article "Musical Trafficking: Urban Youth and the Narcocorrido–

Hardcore Rap Nexus." She elaborates on the close relationship between the aesthetic and the logic of both genres. She argues that the comparative approach of her project is more than just one of "analogous pop trends on either side of the Rio Grande." And she presages her argument by stating that "in an era of permeable borders and transnational identities, the two musical styles evince shared motifs and overlapping fan-bases" (Morrison 2008, 379). Morrison's article speaks directly to Mexican anthropologist Tiosha Bojórquez Chapela's 2007 essay "De narcos y gangstas: similitudes discursivas en torno a la figura del narcotraficante en el narcocorrido y en gangsta rap" (Of Narcos and Gangstas: Discursive Similarities Around the *Narcotraficante* Figure in *Narcorridos* and in Gangsta Rap). Bojórquez Capela compares and analyzes the same two musical and literary genres, widely embraced in the border zone. The author focuses primarily on two songs: "El cartel de a kilo," (The Kilo Cartel) by Los Tucanes de Tijuana, and "La vida loca" (The Crazy Life) by David Rocha El Locote. Although both works focus on the similar structural conditions that gave rise to their existence, "namely, hegemonic neoliberalism that facilitates 'flexible' accumulation for multinational corporations while attenuating joblessness and blight in U.S. cities and economic dispossession of rural Mexicans (Morrison 2008, 279)," Bojórquez Chapela's work argues that gangsta rap was influenced by the *narcocorrido* tradition:

> "Las similitudes discursivo-semióticas entre estos dos géneros sugieren que el narcocorrido tuvo influencia sobre el gangsta rap y si bien la cultura gangsta sale a la luz pública a través de raperos afroamericanos como Ice T, Ice Cube, Easy E y Dr. Dre, originalmente surge dentro de un caldero pluricultural en el que la tradición del pandillerismo cholo y pachuco de la Costa Oeste de los

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Estados Unidos fue retomada por los jóvenes negros y mezclada con la cultura hip-hop surgida en Nueva York" (Bojórquez Chapela 2009, 58)

The discursive and semiotic similitudes between these two genres suggest that the *narcocorrido* influenced gangsta rap. And if the gangsta rap culture came to the public through Afro American rappers like Ice T, Ice Cube, Easy E, and Dr. Dre; it originally came out of the cultural melting pot in which the *cholo* and *pachuco* gang culture of the United States' West Coast formed. This gang culture tradition was picked up by Afro American youths and mixed with the hip-hop culture that emerged in New York City.

Bojórquez Chapela is the Mexican scholar with the longest history of studying hip-hop. Besides the aforementioned article, he also authored *Ritmo Adaptado a la Poesía (R.A.P.): Esbozos para una poética del Hip-Hop* and *¡Que viva el Mexside! Identidad, Producción y Circulación de la Música Hip Hop en la Ciudad y el Estado de México*. Both represent essential pieces of academic scholarship, and both are responsible for establishing Mexican hip-hop studies in Mexico. The first study describes how young Mexicans adapted poetry in Spanish to hip-hop rhythms, and the second is a thorough ethnography of the circulation and production of hip-hop music in the Mexico City metropolitan area.

Recently, the Mexican Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) campus in Monterrey published two articles by cultural anthropologist José Juan Olvera on the expansion of the hip-hop culture in northeast Mexico. The first article, "El Hip-Hop en Monterrey: Apuntes para su historia" (2014), features interviews with seven key local rappers, DJs, and graffiti artists. The essay is a

chronological of how hip-hop was first established in Monterrey, the second-largest city in Mexico. Olvera's intention is to tell the story of hip-hop *regio,* to "help Monterrey society remove the negative stereotypes surrounding hip-hop for them, and to then demonstrate how members of hip-hop are heavily involved in entrepreneurship, teamwork, and social integration through the arts" (Olvera 2014, 3).

Also from 2014, "El rap y la música colombiana: Descripción de dos culturas musicales urbanas de Monterrey y elementos de interacción" is a collaborative effort between Olvera, Benito Torres Escalante, and Raúl Eduardo López Estrada. The essay focuses on rap's vocal/spoken elements and on *música colombiana* because they are "illustrative examples of contemporary processes taking place in the field of youth culture" (157). The authors explore cultural juxtapositions associated with these two genres, and how much of the lifestyles of youths in Monterrey, Mexico are anchored [*anclados*] in both" (157). It is important to clarify that the so-called *Colombia de Monterrey* (164) is a music culture from the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León. Also known as *La Colombia Regia,* this subgenre is based on the enjoyment of musical forms from the northern Colombian coast like *porro, cumbia* and diverse forms of *vallenato* including *paseo, merengue, puya,* and *son* (164). The *Colombiana de Monterrey* is characterized by playing those genres at a much faster pace. The music subculture emerged in the seventies and through the years it has became one of the most important "cultural contributions from the Mexican northeast. Rural and urban-rural narratives are also characteristic of the *Colombiana de Monterrey*. These narratives speak to the experiences of the culture's pioneers who came from the neighboring states of

Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, and Coahuila and settled in the Independencia neighborhood, located in the *Loma Larga* of Monterrey " (164). The authors conclude when comparing the *Colombia of Monterrey* and rap music in Monterrey that they represent two world views (cosmovisiones) or cultural matrixes: "one very traditional, with rural roots, and a strong Catholic and Afro-Latin American influence in the sound. The other is also diverse, but with a strong Anglo-Saxon (*anglosajón*) accent and influences from Chicano, Anglo and Afro-Caribbean (*anglo-afrocaribeño*) influences" (189).

David Cortez's 2004 master's thesis, "Producción y difusión de formas simbólicas: Hip-hop en la Ciudad de México" (Production and Diffusion of Symbolic Forms: Hip-hop in Mexico City) from the UNAM in Mexico City is also important to mention. Although the musical analysis in the study is very simplistic and basic, it is the timeliness of Cortez's thesis that makes it important. It represents the first effort of its kind. In the introduction, Cortez suggests that "rap was just a derivation from rock music composed in Mexico," which is problematic. The author uses John B. Thompson's concept of culture and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus to explain how rap/hip-hop in Mexico represents individual and collective agency. In the second chapter, Cortez revises the social, political, and artistic conditions that allowed rap to explode in the United States. The appropriation of rap by Mexicans is the focus of the third chapter. Cortez explains how rap arrived, the hiatus the music experienced in the nineties, and how it was finally popularized in local manifestations. "The late response of Mexico to such culture," Cortez argues, can only be understood in terms of "specific conditions of appropriation, assimilation, deconstruction, re-signification, and finally, the development

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of a unique Mexican form of hip-hop" (25). A majority of his information comes from interviews with Sociedad Café, the same group that collaborated with Arlene Tickner.

Today, more specific and thorough analyses of Mexican hip-hop should be undertaken by Mexican and North American academia. Options range from consideration of the linguistic impact that Spanish or indigenous languages have had on hip-hop performance, to the pedagogical benefits that hip-hop could have if used in elementary education. The way in which local, regional, or federal governments could facilitate workshops, provide education, promote environmental awareness, and inform the public about human rights represents yet another avenue for hip-hop studies in Mexico. Aside from the handful of efforts described above, independent music journalists in Mexico have conducted a majority of hip-hop research to date. And if hip-hop publications in US academia have a limited audience, that audience is even smaller in Mexico, comprised mostly of artists, young entrepreneurs, music journalists, and hip-hop fans.

CONCLUSION

Mexican hip-hop as a movement and an urban artistic form has always involved the occupation of public space and attempts to inspire social cohesion, particularly among youths. Mexican artists constantly discuss the notion of *barrios*, marginality and *periferia*. By appropriating urban places, rappers reposition themselves as authorities on what "reality" means from the perspective of the subaltern. It could be said that Mexican hip-hop scene is only in its adolescence, yet it is vigorously producing independent music, much as happened during hip-hop's birth in New York circa 1980. Mare Advertencia Lirika's work, her hip-hop beats and rhymes, her workshops, and other forms of expression reflect a social ideology. Gender and indigenous human rights are the issues that Mare has decided to explore. Her Zapotec heritage is reconfigured and hybridized in the process. She uses her own regional migration testimonies, as well as experiences derived from trips to California and Central and South America, to create lyrics that speak to her unique social circumstances in Oaxaca. Her position as a local author with a strong and clear message illustrates how hip-hop can be used to enact new forms of Mexican self-empowerment. Mare's career as understood by García Canclini partakes in the transnational ongoing dialogue between different hip-hop scenes, all members of the global hip-hop nation.

Legendary US rapper and Public Enemy front man Chuck D refers to the "soft colonialism factor" in contemporary hip-hop, by which he refers to the manner in which "certain sounds and production formulae taken from mainstream American hip-hop" have

resonated throughout the world (author interview, April 2009). This phenomenon has not proven detrimental to the Mexican hip-hop scene. It maintains a very healthy, imbued with both local and traditional values of Mexican society alongside transnational influences. Mexico's hip-hop scene is firmly grounded in independent underground circles and is in no danger currently of being distorted by abusive record deals, the influence of major labels, or the mainstream media. Instead, it resides in the periphery. And yet, with the Internet and the free digital tools it offers, Mexican hip-hop truly has evolved into a globally connected scene. It is clear now that hip-hop has become one of the most consequential artistic movements of the last thirty years, and Mexico has not escaped its influence. Hip-hop becomes the common language of repressed groups who speak different languages. Whether hip-hop in Mexico will continue to expand into the mainstream or remain an underground urban force remains to be seen.

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