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Hip Hop al estilo Juárez: Organic Intellectuals in Ciudad Juárez?

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HIP HOP AL ESTILO JUÁREZ: ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS IN CIUDAD
JUÁREZ?

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my beautiful children Xinaí and Octavio, everything I do is for you. Papi loves you! To the mother of my children, Miriam, who has been with me through thick and thin, thanks for staying up with me all those long nights and for waking me up when I would fall asleep on the table studying, I love you baby.

I also want to dedicate this to my friends and family who are either dead or lost in the prison system. I am the only one out of all my friends that went to college after high school. I had many opportunities to go down a wrong path, pero gracias a Dios y a los consejos de mis padres, I chose a different path. All of you inspire me to help change the lives of young people who are involved with gangs and cartels. Thank you.

HIP HOP AL ESTILO JUÁREZ: ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ?

By

DANIEL SANCHEZ

THESIS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: Introduction

For the past seven years, the Juárez-El Paso region has been the site of a ‘drug warzone’ (Campbell, 2009), due to feuding cartels fighting over the control of one of the largest ‘drug corridors’ in the United States, the border region between Texas and Mexico. While many experience the violence taking place in Mexico through media such as magazine articles and documentaries, the citizens of Ciudad Juárez experience the violence first-hand daily. Citizens have grown numb to the death and violence which has overtaken their city, leaving them without much of a voice to speak out against these injustices out of fear for their own lives.

This thesis seeks to explore hip hop from Ciudad Juárez, where Mexican hip hop artists (MCs) use their music as an instrument of resistance and protest against the cartel lifestyle and violence that has overtaken their city, and much more than that, their lives. Their lyrics serve as first-person narratives, which touch on daily experiences of living in a city overrun by drug cartels and a corrupt government. I plan to analyze narratives of Juárez MCs, in search of recurring themes and ideas within the music. In chapter 1, I will provide brief background information concerning the significance of this study. I will also discuss my use of the terms ‘MC’ and ‘hip hop’ by distinguishing MCs from rappers and hip hop from rap. In chapter 2, a review of literature will be addressed along with emerging themes, such as an historical background and characteristics of an MC and a brief history of the organic intellectual, and finding a link between the function of the MC and the organic intellectual. In chapter 3, I will provide the methodology used for this study. In chapter 4, I will provide an analysis of recurring themes from the music as well as interviews, and chapter 5 will provide a conclusion to the study, which will answer the research questions below.

RQ1: What is Juárez hip hop?

RQ2: How does Juárez hip hop reflect the ideas and emotions of those who listen to it?

RQ3: What do Juárez MCs do for or within the community that makes them organic intellectuals?

1.2: Ciudad Juárez

Ciudad Juárez, on the US-Mexican border, has been the site of a drug war dating back to 2008. The thousands who have lost their lives due to cartel violence in Ciudad Juárez have earned the city its nickname, ‘The Murder Capital of the World’. Reported homicide rates for 2008 were 1,623 homicides; 2,754 in 2009; 3,115 in 2010; 2,086 in 2011 (Arreola 2012). News of deaths, carjackings, kidnappings, and extortion of businesses seemed to affect everyone on a personal level. Many citizens also claimed local and federal police and soldiers were also involved in many of the murders, which made them even more fearful for their lives (Rosenberg & Cardona, 2011). Families on both sides of the border lived with the possibility that they or someone close to them could lose their life next, forcing many citizens of Juárez to leave the city for their safety. However, the majority of citizens of Juárez remained in the drug war zone due to financial troubles or problems with immigration, leaving them to face cartel violence head on. Due to the violence, many businesses such as restaurants and bars closed their doors and also migrated from Juárez for safety precautions, many of which opened for business in El Paso, TX. “The existence of extortionists prevented the small businesses that were left from continuing to operate, or even to survive. Absolutely every aspect of the city’s life seemed to deteriorate rapidly (Arreola, 2012).”

Recent statistics show a decline in reported homicides starting after 2011, where homicides dropped to an estimated 803 for 2012, 535 homicides for 2013, and about 125

homicides as of April 2014 (Molloy, 2014,). Arreola (2012) attributes the sudden decrease in violence to the Sinaloa cartel winning control over the local narcotics trade and smuggling routes north. He also claims this sudden decrease in violence has sparked a growth within Juárez where people are no longer as fearful for their safety as they once were. However, he also stated the decrease in violence can only last so long. Wilkinson (2014) states families are slowly returning to the city they once abandoned.

Motorists finally feel safe enough to roll down their car windows. Violence was so severe in the area, and poverty so deep as the economy plummeted, that the residents of entire blocks moved out, often to other cities. Most of the graffiti-marked houses have been vandalized, windows and doors chiseled away. Trash fills streets overgrown with weed. But every few yards, life has returned, evident by laundry hanging on clotheslines or a family dog on a roof.

Still, like Arreola (2012), Wilkinson also believes this decrease in violence may be temporary, as do many citizens of Ciudad Juárez.

1.3 Hip Hop vs. Rap

The terms ‘rap’ and ‘hip hop’ are often used interchangeably when one refers to hip hop music. Ice-T, rapper, actor, and director of *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap* (2012), separates the two by stating,

Rap is a vocal delivery, hip hop is a culture. Anybody can rap, like Big Daddy Kane said, “If you rhyme cat with hat you can be considered a rapper.” The culture of hip hop was a movement that started over 20 years ago in the south Bronx that incorporates 5 elements: the DJ, the dancer –break dancer, street

dancer, graffiti artist, the MC –the rapper, and then the 5th, which is the knowledge of it all and how it connects (About.com, 2012).

Bradley (2010) claims

Rap and hip hop are not synonymous, though they are closely associated that some use the terms interchangeably. Others invest them with distinct values—either rap describes commercialized music and hip hop the sounds of the underground; or rap suggests a gritty lifestyle (as in gangsta rap) and hip hop a more politically and socially conscious approach (as in ‘backpack’ hip hop). At the end of his song “HipHop Knowledge”, legendary rap artist and producer KRS-One succinctly explains the distinction: “Rap music is something we do, but hip hop is something we live.” Hip hop, in other words, is an umbrella term used to describe the multifaceted culture of which rap is but a part.

Wilkins (1999) says

“The hip hop culture, with its booming bass and many voices, lives in America’s inner cities, suburbs, and rural towns. It reaches every continent. Many want to label hip hop as simply black street culture. While hip hop has its origin in black urban America, it has evolved into a cultural form that transcends race, color, and gender, reaching across the world. Rap music commands the attention of politicians, journalists, and social scientists. Rap music and the hip hop culture represent the pulse—the thoughts, values, and experiences—of youth worldwide today. Rap music has been criticized within and outside the black community, but it continues to be popular, despite widespread opposition (Wilkins, 1999).

The terms 'hip hop' and 'rap' have different meanings, but are closely associated. Bradley (2010) states the term 'hip hop' not only refers to a culture, but can also stand for the sounds of the underground that have more of a politically and socially conscious approach as opposed to rap, which is a more commercialized form of hip hop music that suggests a grittier lifestyle (as in gangsta rap). Therefore, for the purpose of this discussion, the term 'Juárez hip hop' will not only refer to the hip hop culture in Ciudad Juárez but also the music it produces.

1.4: MC vs Rapper

People also use the terms 'MC' and 'rapper' interchangeably when referring to hip hop artists. Bradley (2010) claims "MCs, hip hop's masters of ceremonies, are its literary artists. They are the poets and rap is the poetry of hip hop culture." Ice-T describes MCs as people "that can move the crowd and control the audience (SwaysUniverse, 2012)." He claims rappers lack this quality because of the commercialism behind the music. He goes on to state

Back in the day when the DJ was the main foundation of hip hop, they would give the microphone to people and say 'tell everybody how great I am'. And that's how rappers started to first rhyme about the DJ, then rhyme about themselves. But a true MC like KRS-One, when they're onstage, they're just in control of the audience. Rhyming is something they do, but that's not all they do (SwaysUniverse, 2012).

Jelani Cobb (2007) distinguishes MCs from rappers by stating

Every MC raps, but not every rapper is an MC. Flip on your television, turn on the radio, open a magazine and there's a good chance that there's a rapper floating on your medium of choice. An MC, though, is a whole 'nother thing entirely. Microphone Checker, Master of Ceremonies, Mover of Crowds, in hip hop, the

letters MC are as undefined as the X that followed Malcolm's name. The rapper is judged by his ability to move units; the measure of the MC is the ability to move crowds. The MC gets down to his task with only the barest elements of hip hop instrumentalization: two turntables and a microphone. The MC writes down his own material even if he didn't have a record deal. A rapper without a record deal is a commercial without a timeslot (Cobb, 2007, pp. 8-9).

The terms 'MC' and 'rapper' also seem to be associated with each other but are different in their own ways. Therefore, for the purpose of this discussion, I will refer to Juárez hip hop artists I spoke with as 'MCs' or 'Juárez MCs', due to their ability to move crowds, but more importantly, for their creation of politically and socially conscious music as opposed to the commercialized form of hip hop music that rappers make.

1.5: Study Importance

Through their music, Juárez MCs share experiences of living in Ciudad Juárez, especially those dealing with cartel violence. In the US, one hears the word rap or hip hop and often associates it with the hustler or thug persona. Mexico is very limited in opportunities, which leaves many people with the ultimatum of 'work for a cartel or live poor', so one could be quick to assume that a Mexican hip hop artist (MC) could also be involved in or glorify the cartel lifestyle in his music. However, the Juárez MC avoids the cartel lifestyle and speaks out for his city in song. Like the rest of the citizens of Juárez, they are also victims of the violence that has overrun their city for too long. In response, these MCs are using hip hop as a vehicle to transmit their emotions and messages to the people as well as cartels, with the hopes of uplifting their people and mobilizing them to want to make a change. In a society that has no voice to speak

against the daily injustices that occur in Ciudad Juárez, what these MCs do is very important and also, very underappreciated.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This thesis aims to explore and experience hip hop from Ciudad Juárez through the direct lens of Juárez MCs. Therefore, rather than my literature review serving as a history lesson on the origins or politics of hip hop, the focus of this literature review is to provide the reader with an understanding of what an MC is and the role MCs play, where I provide a brief background and characteristics of an MC. This literature review also deals with the concept of organic intellectuals and their function in society; as well as the function of an MC in relation to the concept of organic intellectuals in society.

2.1 The voice of hip hop

Historically, rap music has been formed as a voice for the voiceless and performed as prophetic language that addresses silence, the silenced, and the state of being silenced. It explores the hopes and the human, political, historical, and cultural experience of Black Americans, who initially created rap to express themselves, their ideas, and their problems (Ibrahim, 1999). Stapleton (1998) claims “In the 20-plus years since it emerged in inner-city New York as an alternative to violence and a way to escape harsh urban realities, hip hop has become a worldwide musical and cultural force. Once considered ‘black noise’, hip hop has claimed for itself the role of cultural and political voice for an entire generation of youth.”

Stapleton goes on to state that hip hop’s use of spoken or sung word to tell stories and teach ‘life lessons’ is influenced by the African tradition of griots; which were African storytellers who played the role of oral historians, where they pass down the stories of each generation in song, imparting knowledge about society, and at the same time, ‘telling it like it is’, meaning how MCs use their music to protest against social injustice. Stapleton goes on to state rappers are an urban form of griots, because they use their lyrics to disperse social commentary

about what it means to be young and black in America (Stapleton, 1998). While discussing the importance of the storytelling tradition in hip hop, Jelani Cobb (2007) offers the concept of hip hop serving as an audiobiography, where hip hop allows the MC to share his story through first-person perspective in the form of song. Cobb states MCs draw on their own life experiences through first-person perspective and tell their own story, the music is more personal and revolves around everyday life struggles and experiences, depicted mostly through first-person perspectives.

In his book, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (2005), Chang supports Cobb's explanation of how hip hop's lyrical content revolves around everyday life experiences, by adding that a main element of hip hop is that of protest and resistance to the oppression and poverty. Chang uses Public Enemy as an example of the 1980s era of hip hop for examining how the group's pro-Black militaristic lyrical content and disputes with politicians and interviewers alike, was more than just music. Public Enemy was a group that was publicly against *the man*; their music stood as a public outcry from oppressed African Americans in the US against the injustices they faced as a people during that era, such as the crack epidemic and racially-charged violence like the events that took place at Howard Beach in 1986. NWA was another hip hop group, like Public Enemy, who challenged *the man* with their music as a form of protest and resistance against the injustices African Americans faced in their city during that era such as the Reagan recession, Watts riots, and the Rodney King beating and verdict. Chang stated:

“By calling themselves journalists, Ice Cube and NWA outmaneuvered the hip hop progressives, positioning themselves between the mainstream and those vices. No one else, they claimed, was speaking for the brother on the corner but them – loudly, defiantly and unapologetically. So *Straight Outta Compton* also marked the beginning of hip hop's

obsession with the “The Real”. From now on, rappers had to represent – to scream for the unheard and otherwise speak the unspeakable.” (Chang, 2005, pp. 328).

Although NWA and Public Enemy were lyrically different, they were both similar in the sense that they both represented the *voices of their generation*. They touched on sensitive subjects like racism, poverty, and pro-Black ideologies, in an attempt to mobilize Black people for social change. Chuck D (of Public Enemy) often referred to their music as the ‘CNN of Black People’ (Stapleton, 1998, pp. 222), because of how they spoke against racially-fueled injustices and incidents they experienced on a daily basis. The qualities MCs possess are similar to the qualities in Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals.

2.2 Organic Intellectuals

Antonio Gramsci, in 1920s and 1930s Italy, sought to encourage the development of ‘organic intellectuals’ from within the ranks of the working class through his political journalism and active participation in the workers’ movement. Appelrouth & Edles (2012) state,

“Gramsci emphasized the role of ideas in establishing ‘hegemony’, or domination, over subaltern (oppressed) classes. For Gramsci, the bourgeoisie maintained its dominance not primarily through force or coercion, but through the willing, ‘spontaneous’ consent of the ruled. This consent was the outgrowth of the proletariat adopting as its own the values, beliefs, and attitudes that serve the interests of the ruling class. In other words, the working class is socialized (particularly through the educational system) into accepting a bourgeois ideology as an unquestioned or commonsense view of the world and their place in it. As a result, the working class aligns itself with the status quo, thus granting legitimacy to social and economic arrangements that perpetuate their own exploitation.

Gramsci was convinced that in order for the proletariat to unmask the real sources of its oppression and generate a unified, popular revolt, it must first develop its own 'organic' consciousness, or counter-hegemony. This counter-hegemony would articulate the real interests and needs of the masses; to be effective in provoking revolutionary change, it cannot be imposed on them by bourgeois 'traditional' intellectuals who remain detached from the everyday realities of working-class life."

Saldhana (1988) and King (1978) both state organic intellectuals are "a section of intellectuals who are organically and functionally rooted in the everyday life of the class, acting as an organizing and directing force that serves as a buffer between the influences of ruling class hegemony and the consciousness of the masses of the subaltern class." Saldhana (1998) goes on to argue that "every social group creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. The organic quality of the intellectual is mediated by the structured social relations of a society and is to be judged by its functional closeness to the basic classes seeking hegemony." Gramsci (King 1978; Saldhana, 1988) adds the organic intellectual must be able to "have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favorable to the expansion of their own class; or at least they must possess the capacity to choose the deputies (specialized employees) to whom to entrust this activity of organizing the general system of relationships external to the business itself. It can be observed that the 'organic' intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development are for the most part 'specializations' of partial

aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence (Storey, 2009).”

The characteristics and roles of organic intellectuals are similar to those of Juárez MCs in many ways. They are both organically and functionally rooted in the everyday life of their class. Both also share the capacity to direct and organize crowds and act as the voices of their people using counter-hegemonic doctrine. In the case of the Juárez MC, this counter-hegemonic doctrine comes in the form of the music of Juárez hip hop.

2.3 Political power in hip hop

Several studies have also found the element of protest and resistance to exist in hip hop music such as Martinez (1997), Pardue (2007), Maher (2005), and Tanner, Asbridge, & Wortley (2009). Stapleton (1998) found music and its related culture can also be used as a basis for pragmatic political action. This type of action begins from the premise of shared political interests. Pragmatic political action occurs when individuals and groups use music to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative action to address them. She goes on to state that “rap music is a major source of cultural identity within the African American community, forming a cohesive bond among youth. Hip Hop has established itself as a powerful informational tool and means of resistance. It is not an overstatement to say that despite its faults, hip hop has provided America with one of its only hard-hitting indictments of the social conditions that continue to be a harsh reality for African American young people.”

There is a definite overlap in the literature between the MC and the organic intellectual. Like organic intellectuals, MCs are also a section of intellectuals who are organically and functionally rooted in the everyday life of their own class. They also serve as a buffer between

the influences of ruling class hegemony and the consciousness of the masses of their class by using their music to spread counter-hegemonic ideas and messages. Through their music, they are able to inform and educate their listeners, allowing their audience an awareness of their function in the economic, political, and social fields of society. Stapleton (1998) claims that the presence of confrontational political action in music is implicitly indebted to Gramscian Marxism by stating, “organic intellectuals are individuals who hold close ties to their class of origin and whose function is to express class identity and goals. The relationship of the hip hop artist to a class identity has been clear since hip hop began, where artists often use their music to describe ‘what’s really going on in the ‘hood’ (Stapleton, 1998, pp, 225).”

Juárez MCs are the voices of their community. They hold ties to their class of origin because they *are* their class of origin. Meaning they come from the same impoverished neighborhoods as the rest of the people of their class, they work the same jobs as the people in their class, and have the same values as the people in their class. Through their music, MCs have become spokespeople for the experiences, frustrations, and issues of a people who are afraid to voice their opinions out of fear for their lives. Through their music, MCs allow listeners to become aware of their function in the social, economic, and political fields in society by sharing common experiences and emotions; transforming the consciousness of listeners at the same time.

Juárez hip hop is a testament of life on the streets of Ciudad Juárez, which not only describes the violence, but also shares the experiences, emotions, and struggles the citizens of Juárez face on a daily basis. The cultural expressions in Juárez hip hop provide challenges to cultural hegemony in the form of counter-hegemonic lyrics and songs. MCs believe their message could help stop the growth of cartels, starting with one listener at a time. Many MCs claim the oversaturation of ‘narco-cultura’, a term used to describe the heavy influence of drug

trafficking on Mexican culture (television and films, music, and fashion), has led Mexican youth to believe drug trafficking is an honorable way of living. Juárez MCs are using hip hop as a vehicle to deter Mexican youth from the cartel lifestyle by offering a message of hope and positivity. MCs target the youth of Ciudad Juárez for the same reasons cartels and gangs do, mostly because they are easier to ‘convince’ by showing (brainwashing) them the riches the cartel lifestyle comes with.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Information and Study Area

My study design focused on analyzing narratives from MCs and producers obtained from ethnographic interviews and textual analyses of song lyrics, which are essential to understanding Juárez hip hop. Narratives from people who listen to Juárez hip hop were also collected, in order to find out how, Juárez hip hop reflects the ideas and emotions of its listeners. The focus of this study becomes clearer in the following research questions:

RQ1: What is Juárez hip hop?

RQ2: How does Juárez hip hop reflect the ideas and emotions of those who listen to it?

RQ3: What do MCs do for or within the community that makes them (or does not make them) organic intellectuals?

3.2 Recruitment

In 2012, a friend suggested I view a short documentary that his friends were featured in. The documentary came to be *Barrios, Beats, and Blood* (2010), which is a short film that follows a group of young rappers in Ciudad Juárez who use their music as an instrument to speak against the daily injustices that occur in Ciudad Juárez due to cartel violence. Because I grew up in Ciudad Juárez, I was instantly drawn by the lyrics in the music. Rather than glorify the drug trade, as most narcocorridos do, these rappers were doing the opposite; they were giving detailed accounts of how living in Ciudad Juárez really was. The music in the film was filled with shared experiences of loss and hope for their city. I immediately reached out to some of the MCs featured in the film through Facebook and expressed my interest for a possible study in the future about Juárez hip hop.

Prior to recruitment and IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, my initial study sample were 5 MCs and producers, which included two MCs from the documentary I was able to contact from the documentary. Once UTEP IRB approved my study, I notified my initial contacts about the study once again. My initial sample began as a convenience sample, mostly due to the fact that I had already met with and talked to these MCs and producers about my interest in Juárez hip hop. A total of 10 MCs and producers were interviewed; 3 which came from my initial contact list and the other 7 MCs were acquired using the Snowball sampling method (Goodman, 1961), where in my initial interviews I asked MCs and producers if they could recommend other MCs in Juárez who used their music as a tool of resistance or protest against the injustices of cartel violence. I also held 15 brief, semi-structured, conversational interviews with listeners of Juárez hip hop during two local hip hop events where some of these MCs performed. Additional MCs and listeners of Juárez hip hop were recruited for this study with the following approaches:

1) My initial plan for recruitment of other MCs and producers was to ask my initial participants if they recommend other Juárez MCs who also use their music as a tool of resistance/protest against the injustices of cartel violence. Aside from this method, I also sent messages through Facebook, to MCs that I stumbled upon as I researched Juárez hip hop through YouTube, Soundcloud, and other online music sites as well. The online solicitations look like this: “I’m a student in the Master’s degree program for the Sociology department at UTEP and I am currently researching Juárez hip hop and how MCs are using this genre of music as a form of protest or resistance to the violence that is taking place in Ciudad Juárez. The purpose of the study is to better understand this emerging musical genre and figure out whether or not Juárez hip hop reflects what goes on in Ciudad Juárez. I’ve heard some of your music online and would like to

interview you.” I provided my UTEP email address and phone number as contact information as well as quick details regarding the interview. Translated into Spanish: “Me llamo Daniel Sanchez y soy un estudiante en la Universidad de El Paso (UTEP). Estoy investigando hip hop de Ciudad Juárez y como los MCs utilizan su musica como forma de protesta/resistencia contra la violencia que pasa en Juárez. Escuche tu musica y me gustaria hacerte unas preguntas sobre tu vida y tu musica. El proposito del estudio es para entender lo que realmente es ‘Juárez hip hop’ e investigar si la musica refleja la vida de juarenses. Si gustarias participar, aqui hay unos detalles del proyecto...”

2) The second plan for recruitment was for the listeners of Juárez hip hop. I developed a small survey for listeners to find out their reasons for listening to Juárez hip hop. I approached fans of Juárez hip hop during two local hip hop events, which I thought was the best setting to engage in quick conversations about Juárez hip hop because of the environment. The feedback from listeners is significant to this study because one of my research questions is to find out whether Juárez hip hop reflects the ideas and emotions of its listeners. The data I gathered further affirms the connection between Juárez MCs and their listeners.

3.3 Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through 25 semi-structured interviews involving Juárez MCs, producers, and listeners of Juárez hip hop. Interviews and participant observations were conducted between September 2013 and April 2014. Four research methodological approaches were used for data collection, including netnography, narrative analysis from acquired online and in-person semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a brief textual analysis of lyrics.

I adapted methods used by Robert Kozinets (2002) and conducted a netnographic study on Juárez hip hop music. In his study, Kozinets used ethnographic research techniques to study online communities; for this specific study, I adapted netnographic methods to acquire a better understanding of Juárez hip hop, which is primarily an online community.

“Ethnography refers to forms of social research that tend to have the following features: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them; a tendency to work primarily with ‘unstructured’ data, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories; investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case in detail; analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (Atkinson & Hammersly, 1994, pp. 248).”

Although Kozinets’ (2002) netnography was used as a marketing research technique that used information that was publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups, the methods could be adapted to other research studies that require investigating online communities. This method is important to this study because Juárez hip hop is exclusively found online. Juárez MCs and producers are very active online, where they promote and distribute their music through artistic profiles on social networks such as Facebook, Soundcloud, and Bandcamp, and YouTube. Their music is more easily accessible and distributed through the internet than in record stores, so it’s almost necessary to study their presence online. Through their display of music and videos online, MCs

are able to let the listener into their worlds, by showing the listener their surroundings and how they live, dress, and act in their environment. Juárez hip hop exists in the *underground*, which is a term often used to label locally-made music or music without radio airplay due to its lack of commercial or mainstream appeal. There's a sense of exclusivity to listeners of underground music, where listeners are seen as *insiders* to a world *others* cannot access. "Insiders have strong ties to the online group and to the consumption activity and tend to be long-standing and frequently referenced members. The insiders represent the most redundant data sources. Preliminary research reveals insiders as the most redundant data sources of online communities, based on their devotion and active involvement to their online community (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 6)." In Juárez hip hop, MCs and producers as well as listeners are insiders in their online community of Juárez hip hop. MCs and producers have resorted to online forums, blogs, and social networks to promote and distribute their music. They are knowledgeable of upcoming events, artists, and musical projects due to their active involvement and devotion to the online community. Listeners are insiders in this online community as well because of their active involvement and devotion to the online community of Juárez hip hop, which is based on their extensive knowledge of artists and events involving a music scene that is hardly promoted or played on the radio.

Kozinets states "the strength of 'netnography' is its particularistic ties to specific online groups and the revelatory depth of their online communications. Hence interesting and useful conclusions might be drawn from a relatively small number of messages, if these messages contain sufficient descriptive richness and are interpreted with considerable analytic depth and insight (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 6)." During my study, I acted as an insider myself, by researching the music of Juárez hip hop online through YouTube and music pages on Facebook such as

Noise, Hype, and RapJuárez blogspot. These pages are dedicated to Juárez hip hop, each promotes upcoming music and events as well as upcoming artists in the Juárez hip hop scene. Netnographic methods were essential to this study, since most Juárez MCs depend on the internet to promote and distribute their music through different music websites and online social networks. Most of my initial research consisted of being a member of the exclusive online community of Juárez hip hop. Becoming a member within this community made it easier to come into contact with several Juárez MCs and their music.

The use of ethnographic interviews through the gathering of personal narratives was also an important method used in this study.

The ethnographic interview opens realms of meaning that permeate beyond rote information or finding the ‘truth of the matter’. The interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his/her own idiosyncratic command of a story. The beauty of this method of interviewing is in the complex realms of individual subjectivity, memory, yearnings, polemics, and hope that are unveiled and inseparable from shared and inherited expressions of communal strivings, social history, and political possibility. The interview is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging: *I am because we are, and we are because I am*. The personal narrative is an individual perspective and expression of an event, experience, or point of view (Madison, 2012, pp. 28).

My plan was to conduct in-person interviews with all of my participants but the fact that most of my participants cannot cross into the U.S. due to immigration issues made it difficult to interview all participants in person. Also, the recommendations of my university and the Institutional Review Board to not conduct research in dangerous environments such as Ciudad

Juárez led me to conduct as many interviews possible in El Paso. However, participants were still given the option to participate in in-person interviews or online interviews. The online questionnaires were limited to 5 open-ended questions where participants were allowed to answer at their own pace and in their own privacy. Also, there was no length limit for the answers, which allowed participants to respond freely. In-person questionnaires entailed the same 5 questions, but were also audio-recorded. For safety precautions, I provided participants the option of remaining anonymous. For participants who agreed to an audio-recorded interview, I used the audio recorder in my cell phone to record the interview. I then coded and transferred the interviews into a secure folder in my laptop, which is also password protected for further privacy and confidentiality.

Participant observation was another method used in this study which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of Juárez hip hop through personal involvement with the Juárez hip hop scene. Participant observation provides researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determines who interacts with whom, grasps how participants communicate with each other, and checks for how much time is spent on various activities. It also allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews and observe events or situations that informants have described during interviews, making researchers aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants. Researchers suggest that participant observation increases the validity of the study, as observations may help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Kawulich, 2005). I conducted participant observations during in-person interviews with MCs and producers at recording studios as well as in their homes. I also conducted participant observation during two live hip hop events, where I observed how MCs and listeners of Juárez hip hop interacted with

each other before, during, and after the performances. These observations of listeners of Juárez hip hop at live events were helpful in identifying key themes and behaviors within the hip hop community, as well as motives for why people listen to Juárez hip hop.

The final method I used for this study is textual analysis of certain song lyrics from Juárez MCs, which I adapted from methods used by both Edberg (2004) and Martinez (1997), where they ‘dissected’ songs to find meaning and key themes/messages within the music. The purpose for conducting textual analysis is to give the reader insight into the music of Juárez hip hop by identifying common themes and messages found within lyrics. Using textual analysis, I will attempt to connect the narratives of the MCs and listeners to the content of the music, in an attempt to find out whether Juárez hip hop in fact reflects what is really happening in Ciudad Juárez. This method is important because it helps analyze the music, by identifying and explaining key themes found in lyrics of certain songs of Juárez hip hop. Textual analysis also allows me to find connections between listeners and Juárez hip hop, which is important to this study because I also want to find out the reasons people choose to listen this subgenre of hip hop. An example of the textual analysis of lyrics will look something like this, where I provide a verse, then I will explain the context in the lyrics while translating the song from Spanish to English at the same time:

Todos seguimos en busca de una verdad,
Everybody keeps searching to find truth
si hay imagen del infierno, claro, la de mi ciudad!
If there’s an image of hell it would an image of my city.
Solo pensamos en regresar a casa,
All we think about is making it home safe
Todos los aconteceres, por el control de una plaza.
Look at all these endeavors for the control of one plaza (drug corridor).
Todos lo vemos y callamos (no lo vimos!)

We all see yet remain quiet (We didn't see anything!)

Porque el gobiernno y delinquentes, el resultado es lo mismo.

Because the outcome is the same with criminals or cops. (meaning that they see all the happenings, but don't report crimes or murders because the outcomes may be the same with police as with criminals.----“Juárez City” (Axer Kamikaze, 2010).

This example depicts how the method translates and interprets the song lyrics, searching for key themes and connections to social contexts. This method of textual analysis will go hand in hand with the analysis of narratives acquired through ethnographic interviews during the analysis stage, in order to find out if the music mirrors the narratives.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The first section of the data analysis will focus on defining Juárez hip hop through collected data obtained from semi-structured interviews and textual analysis of song lyrics. The function of the MC, as well as characteristics and recurring themes within the music will also be discussed in this section. The second section of the analysis will focus on how Juárez hip hop reflects the emotions and experiences of those who listen to the music. Data obtained from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis of lyrics will be used to identify how Juárez hip hop is a reflection of the people. The final section of the analysis will discuss if the Juárez MCs I spoke with qualify as organic intellectuals. This final section will determine this by analyzing what the MC does for or within the community through collected data obtained from conducting participant observation and narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews.

4.1 What is Juárez hip hop?

My initial contact for this project was a local producer and videographer from the El Paso/Juárez region known as Lack Nicholson. I met Lack back in 2009, during a T-shirt screening venture I had with my brother. We called ourselves the Border Jumpers. The point of the company was to represent the region of El Paso and Juárez through our t-shirts. We sold shirts with pictures of El Paso/Juárez landmarks and neighborhoods, even some with clever statements like “Si la migra no pudo, menos el muro!,” which is translated into “If the border patrol couldn’t do it, neither can the border fence!”. We also helped promote local artists by distributing their music and upcoming events that were being held in the community. We set up shop every Sunday at local flea markets such as Fox Plaza and the Bronco. Although the

business venture only lasted a year, I am grateful for the Border Jumpers experience because it inspired and influenced this project. Lack Nicholson and his family became victims of the cartel violence of Ciudad Juárez during 2008 when his father lost his life for refusing to pay a ‘quota’ to a cartel. Lack claims the passing of his father has had a major influence on his music, especially with the samples he uses when producing beats. “I try to recreate a sound with a feeling I had during my childhood. As a child, my father always sang around the house, he never let go of his guitar. I remember him always encouraging my brothers and I to sing along with him. When I make beats, I try to capture that emotion that filled my home as a child. (Lack Nicholson, personal communication, October 19, 2014).” Thanks to technological advances, musicians no longer need to record music in professional music studios, many have the luxury of recording from in-home studios. Lack produces his music from his in-home studio and he distributes his music through popular music websites like Soundcloud, YouTube, and Bandcamp.



Fig. 1 Lack's home studio (Bird's eye view).

In 2012, Lack recommended I check out a documentary film in which a few of his friends participated in, the documentary came to be *Barrios Beats and Blood* (2010). Shortly after viewing the film, Lack introduced me to Crohnik Uno, a Juárez MC and producer who lives in El Paso but represents a hip hop crew from Ciudad Juárez, Next Level Records. What interested me about Crohnik was his situation in the documentary, where he was on probation during the film for attempting to cross a car filled with drugs into the US. He explains his reason for crossing the car was to help his mother financially, as he saw her constantly struggle to pay bills, rent, etc. Crohnik chose ‘the easy way out’ and attempted to cross the car, only to have gotten caught at the border port of entry. This situation is a common one for youth on the border, where teenagers and young adults are presented with opportunities to work with cartels every day. Crohnik stated he took to smuggling out of necessity, which is the main reason most youth get involved with cartels. Cartels have been known to attract *barrio* youth, younger crowds in poor neighborhoods, to recruit into their line of work because they can be manipulated easier with money. Grafiko Rap, another MC featured in the documentary, adds to the reasons for why *barrio* youth get involved with cartels:

Para mi el barrio, no pienso que sea algo malo porque es un grupo que ya esta establecido. Dentro del barrio se generan muchos vínculos entre los integrantes del barrio. Solamente que el barrio no ha tenido las oportunidades necesarias o aptas para que pueda crecer mas como grupo. Por ejemplo, por lo regular casi todos los chavos no tienen acceso a escuela, no tienen acceso a un buen trabajo, no tienen acceso a salud, no tienen acceso a varias cosas que les permitiera crecer mas como grupo. Carteles son una de las organizaciones que llegan y les ofrecen algo al barrio, les dan una oportunidad de crecer.” (*Barrios Beats and Blood*, 2010).

Grafiko first addresses the term *el barrio*, which refers to working-class neighborhoods. The term *barrio* is also used in street slang to refer to gangs. The MCs in this documentary consider themselves a product of their *barrio*, their neighborhood is internalized in them, it's a part of what makes them who they are. Grafiko explains that being part of a *barrio* doesn't necessarily mean something negative. He states, "For me, the *barrio* isn't necessarily a bad thing because it's a group that is already established. And within the *barrio* you develop connections between the members. It's just the *barrio* has not been given the right opportunities to grow as a group. For example, almost none of the kids have access to education, they don't have access to good jobs, they don't have healthcare. They don't have access to all the things they need to grow as a group. Cartels are the few organizations that come to the *barrios* and offer *barrio* youth opportunities to better themselves." He adds:

Para empezar siento que es algo frustrante. Porque no podemos salir ni tomar nuestras calles, no podemos salir y tomar un parque, no podemos salir y tomar la esquina de nuestra calle porque llegan los soldados y nos suben porque no podemos estar alli. Llegan y nos ponen el toque de ceda de a partir de las diez de la noche no quieren a nadie alli. Todo esto lo que hemos venido viviendo hace dos años atras ha sido perjudicial en todo los sentidos. En el sentido de que los muertos vienen a hacer, pienso, una partesita muy pequena. Pero aparte el gobierno, en vez de darnos opciones para solucionar el problema, siento que lo unico que esta haciendo es hacer agrandar el problema (*Barrios Beats and Blood, 2010*)."

"For starters, it's something very frustrating, because we can't go out and be on our streets, we can't go to the park, we can't hang out in the corner of our street because the soldiers come and arrest us, telling us we can't be there. Or they impose a curfew because at ten o clock they don't want anyone outside. All that we have lived in these past two

years has harmed us in many ways. What I mean is that the murders are just one very small part of the problem. But the government, instead of giving us options to solve the problem, is just making the problem bigger (*Barrios Beats and Blood*, 2010).”

The curfew Grafiko talks about was a city-wide curfew that was even enforced in 2007 by Juárez mayor at the time, Héctor Murguía Lardizábal, which ordered youth ages 17 and under to stay in their homes from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. for further safety precautions. The youth of Juárez were forced out of their public spaces such as parks, street corners, and even their front yards, due to curfew regulations. Although it was cancelled by Murgias’s successor, Jose Reyes Ferriz in 2008, city officials tried reconsidering the curfew once cartel violence began to escalate after 2008 (Ortega, 2011; Shepherd, 2007). Below is a freestyle rap by another MC, GABO, who was also featured in the documentary. Feel his emotion:

*Idiotas policias, se presume que me deben de cuidar.
Me roban y me insultan parte de mi dignidad personal.
El gobierno, sus leyes y reformas se van de panza,
porque hoy cayeron más de mil en exámenes de confianza.
Paz, será la última palabra que se escuche,
¿Dónde esta Superman o Jesucrist?
para que bajen del cielo y contra esto luchen.
Perdoname Dios, no soy ateo,
simplemente estoy cansado de lo que vivo siento y veo*

----- GABO (*Barrios Beats and Blood*, 2010)

Idiot police who are supposed to protect me,
Rob me and take away my personal dignity.
The government and its reforms are going nowhere,
Because today a thousand police failed the test of confidence.
Peace will be the last word we hear.

Where's Superman or Jesus Christ?
Come down from the sky and fight this
Forgive me god, I am no atheist,
I am just tired of what I live, feel, and see.

----- *GABO (Barrios Beats and Blood, 2010)*

Crohnik closes out the documentary by stating, “Right now, it’s [Cd. Juárez] a disaster because of the drug wars, but we try to ignore it and keep on going with our lives. That’s not going to stop us from expanding this hip hop movement (*Barrios Beats and Blood, 2010*).”

Grafiko Rap adds:

Hip hop apenas esta empezando a tomar otra vez auge. Ahora si ya el hip hop, como tal con sus cuatro elementos. Y creo que ha sido muy bueno ya que lo hemos estado utilizando como un lenguaje alternativo a la violencia (*Barrios Beats and Blood, 2010*).

“Hip hop is getting big again, with its four elements. I think the use of hip hop has been very positive, especially since now we are using hip hop as an alternative language to the violence (*Barrios Beats and Blood, 2010*).”

Besides word-of-mouth, the use of the Internet has been the most popular method among Juárez MCs for distributing and promoting music and upcoming events. Along with the use of in-home studios and studio software like ProTools, Logic, and Reason to create music, many MCs rely on music websites such as Soundcloud, Myspace, Bandcamp, and YouTube to promote and distribute their music by selling it or offering it through free download links. They also use social network websites such as Facebook and Twitter to promote musical releases and

upcoming events. Many MCs praised the internet for its convenience, claiming that there is no faster way to update several people at once about upcoming music and events.

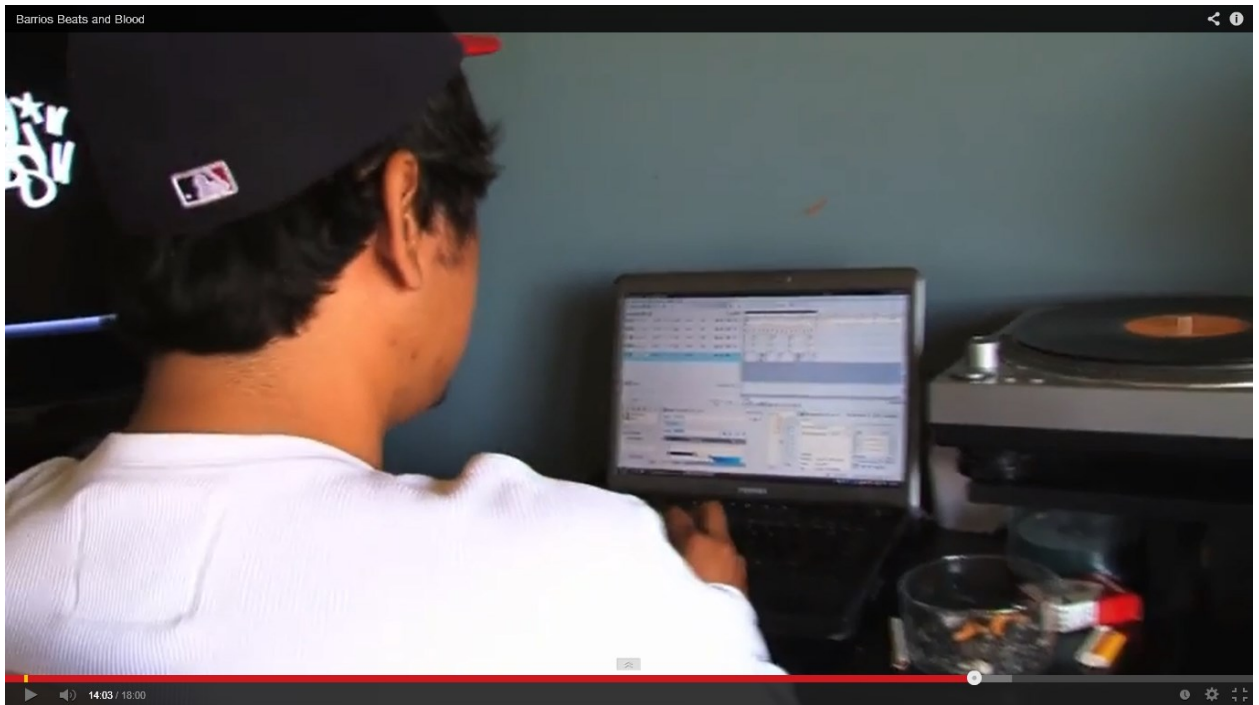


Fig. 2 Screenshot of Crohnik Uno producing a beat during *Barrios, Beats, and Blood* (2010).

4.2 How does Juárez hip hop reflect the ideas and emotions of those who listen to it?

Axer Kamikaze, one of my initial contacts, is a member of the Belzebu Crew and the Alto a la Violencia collective. He is also one of the main MCs featured in the documentary film *Barrios Beats and Blood* (2010). In the documentary, he states:

“El rollo que nosotros hacemos es más hip hop, pero entre el hip hop, siempre está la protesta y pos lo que está pasando aquí [Cd. Juárez], tienes que decirlo afuerzas. Me impactó mucho al principio. Dices ‘no quiero salir a la calle’. Pero

yo siempre creí que íbamos a aprender a vivir así y es lo está pasando, la gente se está acostumbrando a ver tantos muertos (*Barrios Beats and Blood*, 2010).”

He says “what he and his peers do is hip hop. Within hip hop, the element of protest has always existed in hip hop and with all that’s going on here [Cd. Juárez], you have to talk about what’s going on. The drug war made a huge impact on me since it began, you don’t even want to go outside. I always believed that we were going to learn to live like this, and that’s exactly what is happening today; the people are getting used to seeing so many people dead.” During our interview, I asked Axer to elaborate on this quote and he added that he uses his music to discuss what goes on everyday in Juárez. We talked about how the media, such as news outlets on television, try to downplay the violence in Mexico in order to avoid public panic and the deaths of journalists. And even though the murders have decreased by large numbers (Molloy, 2014), they are still happening. Axer says he, and other MCs like him, feel compelled to speak for their city because every one else is afraid to do so. And while news stations and mainstream newspapers like *El Diario* try to focus on ‘bigger’ news than cartel violence, MCs are on the frontline, continuing to give daily reports from the warzone that is Ciudad Juárez.

Axer wrote a song called *Juárez City*, an ode to his city in shambles, which is also featured in the documentary:

<i>Todos seguimos en busca de una verdad</i>	We all keep searching for the truth.
<i>Si hay imagen de un infierno, claro, la de mi ciudad,</i>	If there’s an image of hell, it would my city’s!
<i>Solo pensamos en regresar a casa,</i>	All we think about is returning home safe,
<i>todos los aconteceres por el control de una plaza,</i>	Look at all that goes on for the control of a ‘plaza’.
<i>Todos lo vemos y callamos como mimos</i>	We all see it, but stay quiet like mimes
<i>porque el gobierno y delinquentes el resultado es lo mismo.</i>	Outcomes are the same with criminals or police.
<i>Cataclismo cada vez que se encuentra en un atraco,</i>	Cataclysmic events come with every crime.
<i>la violencia rebazo todo cuerpo policiáco;</i>	The violence has overrun our police.
<i>si, desayunamos en el Hades</i>	Yes, we eat breakfast in hell,
<i>corrupción nos golpea, Ya bien duro y ya sin güantes,</i>	Corruption has beaten us hard and without gloves.
<i>elegantes burgeses y una ciudad que ya es muda,</i>	Elegant bourgeoisies in a city that’s gone mute.
<i>los niños ya sin padres pero la verdad es cruda,</i>	Children left without their fathers, the truth is raw

Evidencia no miente, ya vez que duele.

Aquí hay de dos, la que vivimos y los que la ven por tele

No cerrare la boca si esto es lo que estoy viviendo

aquí no hay duda que esto ya se fue al infierno,

secuestros y extorciones e inocentes muriendo;

políticos son títeres, son títeres de narcos,

nos volvemos locos como Valdez,

Juan Gabriel y tu ciudad LA de aquella vez

les presento un Baghdad, si, pero sin gringos,

no importa la hora los sicarios no descansan los domingos,

terrorismo visual con mantas de propaganda,

con espray voy a pintarles pero todas las demandas;

preocupado por cholesterol, Reyes Baeza

no estes fuera del super, nos apuntan a la cabeza

más pobreza injusticia oh es lo primero

desperdician a un ejecutado cada vez un noticiero,

los niños cambiaron canicas por metralletas

Mientras riquillos gritan gol al son de indios,

los chiquillos ven morir a su papá y su vida en líos;

no hay solución solo esperanza los sostiene;

Calderon combate el narco, solo al lado que conviene

les presento a otro protagonista, Reyes Ferriz –

-un infeliz que debería estar muerto, en un veliz

como miles yo no pienso irme a ningún lado

ni volar, emigrar, mucho menos de mojado,

situación de guerra entre Sinaloa y Juárez

el Chapo la línea inocentes y militares

aquí vive quién mata y muere el que falla,

discotecas incendiadas este es campo de batalla

ignorancia que suicida ya pero a mi city

--- llegaron las elecciones traidores aventar confetti

les gusta ver el sufrimiento que otro goza

solo unos beneficiados con millones en la bolsa

alcaldes presidentes senadores los detesto

haciendo leyes subiendo el IVA, nunca van a solucionar

nadie se defiende, ni hablan, por que les temes?

sigue comprando mentira barata en el PM

esto es para todos no debería ser la derrota

un día sufrirán porque Dios no acepta la cuota

Evidence doesn't lie, see how it hurts?

we live it while you see it in your t.v.

I won't shut my mouth because this is how I'm living.

There's no doubt this has all gone to hell.

Kidnappings, extortion, and innocents dying.

Politicians are puppets. And they belong to the cartels.

We've gone crazy like El Loco Valdez.

Juan Gabriel, look at your city, that you once sang of.

I present to you a Baghdad, without Americans

no matter the hour, hitmen don't rest on Sundays.

Visual terrorism with cartel propaganda on posters

I'm gonna spraypaint all of our demands on the walls.

worried about cholesterol, Reyes Baeza

Don't stand outside the store, you'll get a gun pointed at you.

More poverty and injustice comes first,

as news anchors forget another executed person.

Children have traded in their marbles for machine guns.

While rich kids are screaming 'goal', cheering on the Indios

Little ones see their father die, now their life's ruined.

There's no solution only hope

Calderon battles cartels, the ones that aren't his friends.

I introduce Reyes Ferriz, another protagonist

who deserves to die and be found in a suitcase.

Like the rest, I don't plan on leaving my city anytime soon.

I will not fly or migrate to America.

The situation of war between Sinaloa and Juárez,

el Chapo, La Linea, and the military.

Here, the one who kills lives and the one who fails dies

Burnt down nightclubs, this is a battlefield.

Ignorance has forced my city to kill itself.

Elections have arrived, traitors start to throw confetti,

they love to see us suffer

while only a few benefit with millions in their pocket.

Mayors, presidents, and senators, I hate them,

making up laws to raise taxes, this will never end.

Nobody defends themselves, why are you afraid?

Keep buying cheap lies from newspapers.

this is for everybody, we can't be defeated.

One day they'll suffer because God doesn't accept quotas.

--- Juárez City (Axe Kamikaze, 2010)

This song was released in 2010 and speaks on what was going on during the peak of the drug

war in Ciudad Juárez. Like most citizens of Cd. Juárez, MCs are victims of cartel violence and

Axe is no different, as he expresses the frustrations and emotions of the citizens of Juárez

through song. In the beginning of the song he says "all we think about is returning home, look at

all that's happening for the control of a plaza. We all see it but stay quiet like mimes because

the results are the same with criminals or the government.” Cartel violence not only affects those involved with cartels but innocent people as well, who also fall victim to shootings, car jackings, kidnappings, and extortion. “The feeling of wondering whether you’ll return home at the end of the day is one that most citizens in Ciudad Juárez face every day (Axer Kamikaze, personal communication, December 5, 2013).” The song states the people of Juárez see crimes and murder committed everyday but stay quiet and don’t report what they’ve seen because the outcomes are the same with criminals or the government, insinuating that government officials and police are just as untrustworthy as criminals. When he’s talking about the control of a plaza, he is referring to the border port of entry of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, which is considered to be one of the largest drug corridors in the Southwest region, which many say is one of the causes for the escalation of violence in the city.

He shares his concern for the youth of Juárez with lines like “the raw truth is that children are being left without fathers, now their life is ruined” and “kids are trading in their marbles for machine guns.” His line of ‘kids trading their marbles for machine guns’ struck me the most because I’ve seen it with my own eyes, just as everyone else who lives in the border region has. The ‘narco-culture’ has had a strong impact on today’s Mexican culture, from telenovelas and movies to music and style of dress and speaking. Axer says “the days of playing ‘cops and robbers’ or ‘cowboys and Indians’ are over now, today it’s ‘narcos contra los federales’ (druglords vs federal agents). You see kids playing with toy machine guns emulating what they see on television or hear on the radio (Axer Kamikaze, personal communication, December 5, 2013).” Axer fears today’s children will grow up and into the cartel lifestyle because it’s what they’ve see it all around them; not only through television and music, but in real life. He says it’s becoming a cycle where these kids grow up admiring the cartel lifestyle and often get involved in

drug trafficking themselves, where they usually wind up either dead or in prison or dead. Axer says this cycle is neverending because as soon as ‘narcos’ (drug traffickers) die or go to jail, they are instantly replaced by the next narco climbing up the ranks, and so on and so forth.



Fig. 3 Axer visiting the gravesite of one the members of his rap crew who lost his life due to the violence in Ciudad Juárez.

The second half of the song is very brave as he attacks politicians who were in power at that time of the song’s release such as Mexican President Calderon, Chihuahua governor Jose Reyes Baeza, and Juárez mayor Jose Reyes Ferriz; he also mentions Chapo Guzman, the Sinaloa cartel and La Linea (Juárez cartel). Many Mexican journalists have died for mentioning cartel members in their articles and news reports, but Axer does so wittingly. He claims politicians are the cartel’s puppets, insinuating that the Mexican government is run by cartels. He even calls Mexican President Calderon a thief and accuses him of being involved with a cartel. He also refers to Juárez mayor (at the time) Jose Reyes Ferriz as ‘another protagonist who deserves to die

and found in a suitcase'. This song is a great description of Ciudad Juárez at its worst and speculations about the Mexican government's involvement with drug cartels. Axer's use of hip hop allows him to address these speculations in a unique manner to address a younger crowd, educating and empathisizing with his listeners at the same time.

In 2012, Axer was featured in a few songs with Alto a la Violencia, a rap collective from Ciudad Juárez that consists of MCs, DJs, producers, break dancers, graffiti artists, and graphic designers. I discovered Alto a la Violencia as I researched Axer's music profile on Soundcloud.com. I was fortunate to have been able to contact a few members of the collective, starting with G-Fone, the collective's primary organizer. G-Fone describes the origin and function of the collective as a whole:

El colectivo nacio en Diciembre del 2011. Nos formamos de 4 MCs, un DJ, y aparte tenemos mucha gente trabajando con nosotros en grafiti, diseño grafico, y break dancers. Nuestro colectivo nase en base a una protesta no al gobierno ni a los sistemas sino a las familias de Cd. Juárez que creemos que hemos venido a ser parte de esta violencia, ya sea verbal, emocional, física o sexual. Y claro narramos las cosas como son, pero duela a quien le duela. Es una vision enfocada a que la sociedad fomente, entre la juventud y futuras generaciones, valores y principios que fortalezcan la integridad y la unidad de las familias a través de la cultura y el arte, y así restaurar una sociedad dañada por la violencia. Enfocada cien por ciento en la recuperación de nuestro más preciado derecho, mismo que hace algunos años el crimen organizado nos quitó, el derecho a la paz. La violencia afecta especialmente a niñas, niños y jóvenes de comunidades vulnerables dispersas en los barrios de Ciudad Juárez, acentuando la

discriminación que da origen a esa violencia. Pero la posibilidad de expresar sus problemas y el de su entorno, los convierte en actores del cambio. Nuestra musica y conferencias actuan en observación de las necesidades que tiene la juventud de expresar sus ideas e interactuar así de manera sana con la sociedad. Promoción a talentos al igual romper paradigmas en relación a este movimiento con el pandillerismo y en general el comportamiento nocivo para la sociedad.

(G-fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014)

“The collective was birthed in December of 2011. We started as four MCs and a DJ, but others are involved in the collective that are graffiti artists, break dancers, and graphic designers. The foundation of our collective is based on the element of protest, but it’s more of a call for action to the families of Ciudad Juárez, which we believe have also become a part of the violence that is taking place, be it verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual. We narrate what’s going on and how it affects us, regardless if people get offended. It’s a vision focused on a society that encourages the integrity and unity of family through the art of hip hop and hip hop culture, which helps restore a society that has been deeply affected by violence. It’s a vision focused 100% on the recuperation of our most precious right, the same right that we’ve lost a few years back to organized crime, our right to peace. The violence has made the most impact on kids and young adults from vulnerable, dispersed communities found in the barrios of Ciudad Juárez; it’s in these same communities where the origins of violence are most prominent. Presenting them with the possibility that they [Juárez youth] can use music to express themselves and their ideas puts them in the position of becoming social actors, where they can do the same and possibly much more. Our music and events act out the necessities our youth need to express their ideas and

interact with society in a healthy manner, by breaking down paradigms of gang life and harmful behaviors in society, through the music (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014).”

*Para las familias que han perdido un ser querido
Dedicado para el buen amigo que se ha ido,
enciendo una vela pa alumbrar tu camino,
me duele en el alma pero asi es el destino,
mil lagrimas callendo de tu fotografia,
tristes recuerdos se vuelven mi agonía,
un ramo de flores, homenaje a tu ausencia,
aunque ya no puedas verme viviras en mi consciencia.
Despedida eterna y no fue cuestion de suerte,
un puno de tierra vida despues de muerte,
solo dios sabe el lugar que merecemos,
sabemos cuando venimos mas no cuando nos iremos.*

To the families who’ve lost a loved one.
Dedicated to my good friend who has left us.
I light a candle to light up your path,
it hurts my soul, but that’s destiny.
A million tears falling form your photograph
Sad memories turn into my agony.
I leave you flowers as an homage to your loss.
Even though you can’t see me you’ll live on in my conscience.
Eternal life wasn’t a thing of luck
dust to dust, but there’s life after death
only God knows the place we deserve.
We know how we came but not how we’ll leave.

---Puño de Tierra (Alto a la Violencia, 2013)

I asked G-Fone if he was afraid or fearful of his music reaching cartels or corrupt government officials, he responded, “Si, a veces hay miedo, pero es parte de nuestra batalla de todos los dias. Pero tambien, uno de los valores del rap es decir la verdad, a quien le duela bro.” His answer was similar to other Juárez MCs by saying, “Yes, sometimes there is fear, but its part of our daily battle. Plus, one of the main elements of rap is to tell the truth (what you see), regardless if people get offended (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014)

*El mensaje es claro y directo para la audencia,
tanta violencia rigiendo afuera en la calle
me a puesto a valorar los pequenos detalles
hoy quiero estar mas tiempo con mi familia
quiero mostrar respeto pa mis pandilla
es algo mas que solo rima en mi texto
hay un mensaje debajo de mis pretextos
es que imagino y eso me basta y me sobra
que vuelva a brillar el sol en el valle de sombras
senor policia donde jugara sofia con seguridad?
mi confianza ya no se fia.*

Van Van Van!

Suenan las balas, en el aire sumban y chocan con mis palabras

Van van van!

Son mis palabras, directo a tu chompa pa que tu mente se abra.

Lluvia de balas, Angeles sin alas

Prognostico profetico de temporadas malas

Las buenas noticias se dibujan en sonrisas

Dulce veneno, sabor a lagrimas amargas

Calles vacias por el click de las descargas

Cuantas historias se cuentan en la city?

Cuantos ‘in memories’ pintados en grafiti?

The message is clear and direct for the audience.
So much violence overrunning the city
has made me thankful for the smaller details in life.
Today I want to spend more time with my family.
I want to show my clique respect.
There’s something more than rhymes to my text
There’s a message underneath my lyrics.
It’s because I imagine and that’s enough
to bring back the sunshine to the valley of shadows.
Mr. Officer, where will Sofia play safely?

I no longer trust.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Sounds of bullets crashing with my words.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

My words hit your head for you to open your mind.

It’s raining bullets, angels without wings.

The prophetic prognostic of evil times.

Good news comes in drawings of happy faces

the taste of sour tears, sweet poison.

Empty streets due to clips unloading.

How many stories do they have about my city?

How many ‘in loving memory’ tags of graffiti?

*Cuantos mas tienn que morir para nasca la paz?
Y la sinceridad no tenga que usar un antifaz!
Cuantos mas van a crecer con odio y tambien con rencor?
Buscando amor para que le oscura el inmenso dolor
Que se contagia en el alma y la conciencia
Cuantos mas vamos a decir basta delincuencia?!?!
-----Lenguas Sagradas (Alto a la Violencia, 2013)*

How many more have to die so peace can be born?
When will sincerity not wear a mask?
How many more will grow with hate and anger?
Searching for love to hide this immense pain
that is contagious to the soul and conscience.
How many more will say stop the delinquency?!?!



Fig. 5 G-Fone performing during the Alto a la Violencia tour of 2012. Notice how the crowd is mainly comprised of young people.

The Alto a la Violencia collective is unique because most of the members are ex-gang and cartel members who have changed their lives for positive reasons. Their past allows them to reach the youth with their message of positivity more efficiently because they speak the same language (slang), they have the same body language and also dress alike; which makes it easier for listeners to identify with the music. Notice how the crowds in the background of Figures 5 and 6 are mostly young people. If you look in the background, their style of dress is no different to the style of dress as the listeners. MCs dress like the ‘street kids’ in their audience, sporting baggy jeans and shorts with baseball caps and sunglasses. Subliminally, by dressing and speaking like the listeners of Juárez hip hop, MCs make it easier for people to relate with their

music. The way MCs clutch the microphones make them look as if they are anxious to speak, and they are. They are anxious to spread their message of positivity to as many Mexican youth as possible, urging them to deter from the cartel lifestyle. The collective use themselves as primary examples to their audience, demonstrating their own change to listeners, in an attempt to transform their consciousness to a more positive life.



Fig. 6 Screenshot of the Alto a la Violencia collective on tour in 2012.

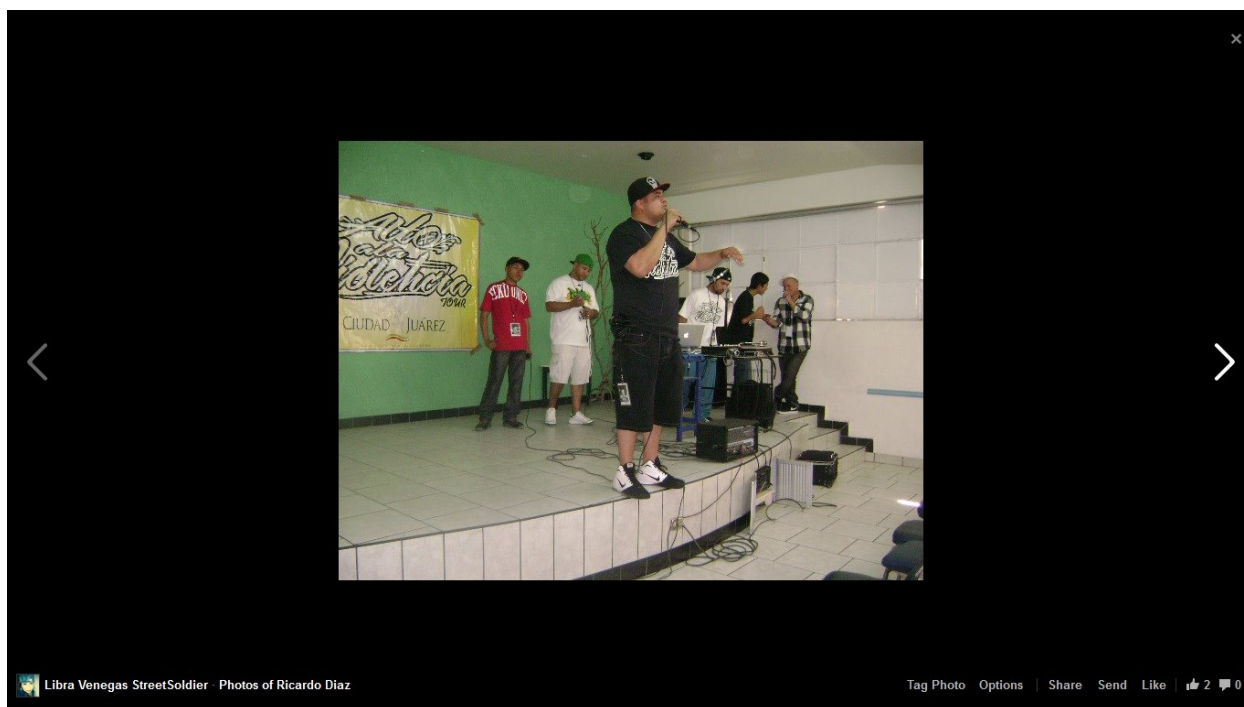


Fig. 7 Screenshot of Alto a la Violencia performing at a conference during their 2012 tour.

Some MCs in the collective happen to be Christian and often recognize God in their lyrics as being responsible for their positive change in their lifestyles, where some songs make references to characters, stories, and verses of the bible in their music. During our interview, I asked G-Fone if he considers their music as a form of Christian Rap because of the collective's messages of positivity and G-Fone replied:

Creo que ha sido difícil ganar al público porque lamentablemente pocos gustan de un mensaje de esperanza, paz etc... El hip hop vende mierda bro... sexo, violencia verbal, drogadicción... Pero gracias al esfuerzo y al no bajar los brazos hemos ganado el respeto de Cd. Juárez. Lo chido de el colectivo es que logramos comunicar una visión sin diferencias de religiones. Yo soy cristiano, otros católicos, otros nada. Y hemos logrado entendernos y comunicar un mensaje constructivo (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014)."

He says “it’s been hard winning the public over because few people like listening to a message of hope, faith, peace, etc. Mainstream hip hop sells garbage: sex, verbal violence, and drugs. But thanks to our determination we’ve been able to earn the respect of Cd. Juárez. The cool thing about the collective is that are able to communicate our vision regardless of religions. I am a Christian, others are Catholics, and others nothing. We’ve come to understand each other and communicate a constructive message (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014).”

The members of the collective all have a background of street life. Some members of the collective are ex-gang members, some have had experiences with drug addiction, or selling/trafficking drugs as well. What they all have in common is that they’ve changed their lives for the better and use their past lives as examples in their music so that listeners can learn from the mistakes MCs have committed.

Mensajero, which means ‘Messenger’ in English, is a producer and rapper for the Alto a la Violencia collective who has this very background. Mensajero was a gang member as a teenager. As he got older, he began selling drugs as well as abusing them. It wasn’t until he got arrested and while in prison, found God. He realized that God led him to the path of sharing his story with others, in hopes of preventing future youth from committing the same mistakes. Mensajero says hip hop is a “perfect tool to engage the youth in action (Mensajero, personal communication, March 25, 2014).”

Although Mensajero mostly produces, he spreads his story of hope on the microphone as well as on the street. When I spoke with him, we walked around the Bronco flea market on Alameda Street in El Paso. He had an entourage of young kids with him who were passing out flyers to an upcoming event Mensajero was performing in. At first glance, one would assume these kids were ‘gangsters’ because they were dressed in baggy pants and oversized t-shirts and

had tattoos all over their arms. But when I asked Mensajero about his group he was quick to defend them by saying, “these are my ‘chavos’ (his kids). I’m helping them find a better path right now. Right now they are helping me promote a future show, and at the same time, I’m keeping them out of trouble. I’m showing them another path of life (Mensajero, personal communication, March 25, 2014).” The environment of the flea market is heavily influenced by Mexican culture, where most vendors and buyers are mostly of Mexican descent. The sounds of narcocorridos and smell of *tacos de barbacoa* and *menudo* filled the air as we walked and talked hip hop through the flea market. I noticed how he and his ‘chavos’ mostly approached young males who dressed and spoke in a similar fashion. But after our interview and listening to his music, I understood why. Mensajero was targeting a certain audience, teenage and young adult males who were walking the same path that he once did. And his mission was to steer them another direction using himself as his greatest example.

Hammer Espada is another member of the collective with a background similar to Mensajero’s.

A los 14 años empecé a cantar rap. Ya que me la vivía en las calles, estuve en algunos concursos en los cuales ganamos otros amigos y yo. Luego despues de involucrarme en pandillas, venta y uso de drogas, despues caí en la carcel en estados unidos y allí conocí al buen Dios que cambió y me preparó para dar un buen rap positivo que transforma vidas. Decidí buscar a Dios, sabiendo que es el unico que peude cambiar a la gente, y empeze a escribir canciones que tocan los corazones. Hoy en dia canto lo bueno y lo que estoy seguro que puede ayudar a la gente involucrada en delitos graves (Hammer Espada, personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Hammer says he started rapping since he was fourteen. He was involved with gangs and sold drugs as well as consumed them. It wasn't until he got arrested and was convicted on this side of the border that he decided to change his life. It was this experience that led Hammer to find God. Hammer says God helped him prepare to make rap music with a positive message to help transform lives. Hammer believes the message in his music can especially help those who are involved in serious situations like drugs or gangs. His song 'Manager' introduces himself to the people who knew the old Hammer as a re-born Hammer, where he describes his past by comparing it to his present lifestyle.

*Es que jesucristo, es mi manager
Yo ya no soy el mismo de ayer.
Solamente, tuve que creer
Que resucito, al dia tercer.....*

*Yo ya no camino con cigarros en la oreja
Hace mucho tiempo que el diablo no me maneja
Esto es prueba a que soy nueva creatura
Por eso ya no cargo pistola en la cintura
Ya no necesito cuidarme de mi mismo,
desde que pertenesco al cuerpo del cristianismo
Y camino y predico y el hammer no se raja
Y en el calcetin tampoco traigo navaja
Nuevo vaso, nuevo jarro, sigo siendo barro
Tampoco cargo un tubo en la cajuela de mi carro
Tengo una fuente de vida que no se me agota.
No se me seca la boca, ya no fumo mota
Ya no necesito ser lider de una pandilla
Para sentirme bien, participar en las rencillas
Para elevarme, ya no uso cocaína
Ya no destruyo vidas vendiendoles heroína
Jesucristo me cambio, mi lamento el baile
El cuida de mi casa, ya no tengo un Rottweiler
Ya no necesito hacer gestos de hombre malo
Ya no digo sacalo, ya no digo prendelo
Tengo un nuevo dueño, y le pongo empeño
Si quieres aprender, con gusto yo te enseño
--Manager (Hammer Espada, 2013)*

Jesus Christ is my new manager
I am not the same one as yesterday.
All I had to do was believe
that He was resurrected, on the third day

I don't walk around with a cigarette on my ear anymore.
It's been a long time that the devil doesn't manage me.
This rap is proof that I'm a new creature,
This is why I don't carry a gun on my hip anymore.
Ever since I joined Christianity,
I don't feel the need to keep me from myself.
I walk and I preach and Hammer doesn't cower.
I don't even need to carry a knife in my sock.
New cup, new pitcher, but I'm still the same hood.
I don't even need to carry a weapon in my trunk.
I drink from an everlasting fountain of life,
I'm never thirsty because I don't smoke weed anymore.
I don't need to be a leader of a gang anymore.
I don't need to hate anymore to feel good about myself.
I don't need cocaine anymore to elevate my mind.
I don't ruin lives anymore selling people heroine.
Jesus Christ changed me, the drug game is lamenting.
He takes care of my house, I no longer need a Rottweiler.
Now I don't need make gestures of a bad man
Now I don't ask for coke, now I don't ask for smoke.
I have a new manager and I work hard
If you want to learn, I will gladly teach you.

I also asked Hammer if he considers his music more Christian hip hop than Juárez hip hop.

Hammer replied that he he isn't embarrassed about his religion and that he does consider his music Juárez hip hop. "I've been rapping since I was 14. I rapped about what I saw and was

going through at that point in my life too, the music was more ignorant, more ‘gangsta’. Today, my music has changed positively, thanks to God. My religion doesn’t embarrass me, it’s given me strength to spread my message to others I meet everyday (Mensajero, personal communication, March 25, 2014).” Hammer has a similar approach to Mensajero’s, where he mostly approaches youth with his music on a daily basis, especially those involved in gangs or those who have problems with drug addiction. He also frequents drug rehab centers, jails, schools, church events as well as hip hop events to spread his message of positive change.



Fig. 8 Screenshot of Hammer Espada and Martillo Records during *Pecador* (2014) music video.

The listening audience is comprised mostly of youth and young adults on both sides of the border, but mostly from Ciudad Juárez. Most come from working class families or are part of the working class themselves. The listeners view Juárez hip hop as an affirmation of how they live and feel every day in Ciudad Juárez. Many of whom I’ve spoken with claim this music expresses the feelings of pain and frustration that many citizens of Juárez hide out of fear for their lives.

“With all of the negativity that surrounds us, it feels good to hear people talking about what happens to us everyday...” (Fan 06, personal communication, 2013)

“I first heard about hip hop from Juárez through friends in school and Facebook, but I never really paid attention to it because I thought it shared the same qualities as narcocorridos, where they worship drug lords and traffickers. It wasn’t until I lost my cousin to cartel violence that I actually started paying attention to the music. The music reassures me that I’m not the only one with these feelings of sadness and anger towards all that’s happening in my city...” (Fan 04, personal communication, 2013).

Music videos by Juárez MCs often depict sceneries of Juárez, which offer the listener a landscape to the music. Listeners of Juárez hip hop also identify with MCs by observing their body language as they deliver their lyrics, as well as their style of dress and how they conduct themselves. MCs give hints of Ciudad Juárez in their music videos by recording themselves in front of recognizable places or standing next to monuments in the city, which allow the citizens of Juárez to identify with the city and MCs. For example, in Fig. 3, which is a screenshot of a music video by the Alto a la Violencia collective, an MC is holding a popular local newspaper, PM, which details daily accounts of the violence in Ciudad Juárez. Those who live in Ciudad Juárez are familiar with this newspaper and its content. By showing the newspaper in the video, the MC uses the newspaper to identify with what listeners see everyday, death. The cover reads “matadera no para!” which translates to “the killings don’t stop!”



Fig. 3 Screenshot of the music video *Arte no violento* (2014) by Alto a la Violencia collective.



Fig. 4 Screenshot of the *Alto a la Violencia* (2012) music video.

MCs often perform at local hip hop events usually held at bars and clubs, mostly during the day. Axer claimed the reason for many shows being held during the day is mostly due to bar

and club owners who still associate hip hop and rappers to crime. Axer also claimed the narcocorrido scene brings in more money than the hip hop crowd, due to its popularity. Another reason for bars and clubs refusing to hold hip hop shows during the day is the curfew that was issued on the youth during the peak of the drug war (Ortega, 2011). Although the city-wide youth curfew was cancelled around 2008, Axer believes the stigma of crime still follows hip hop and anyone associated with it (Axer Kamikaze, personal communication, December 5, 2013). Thus, another reason for their heavy presence online.

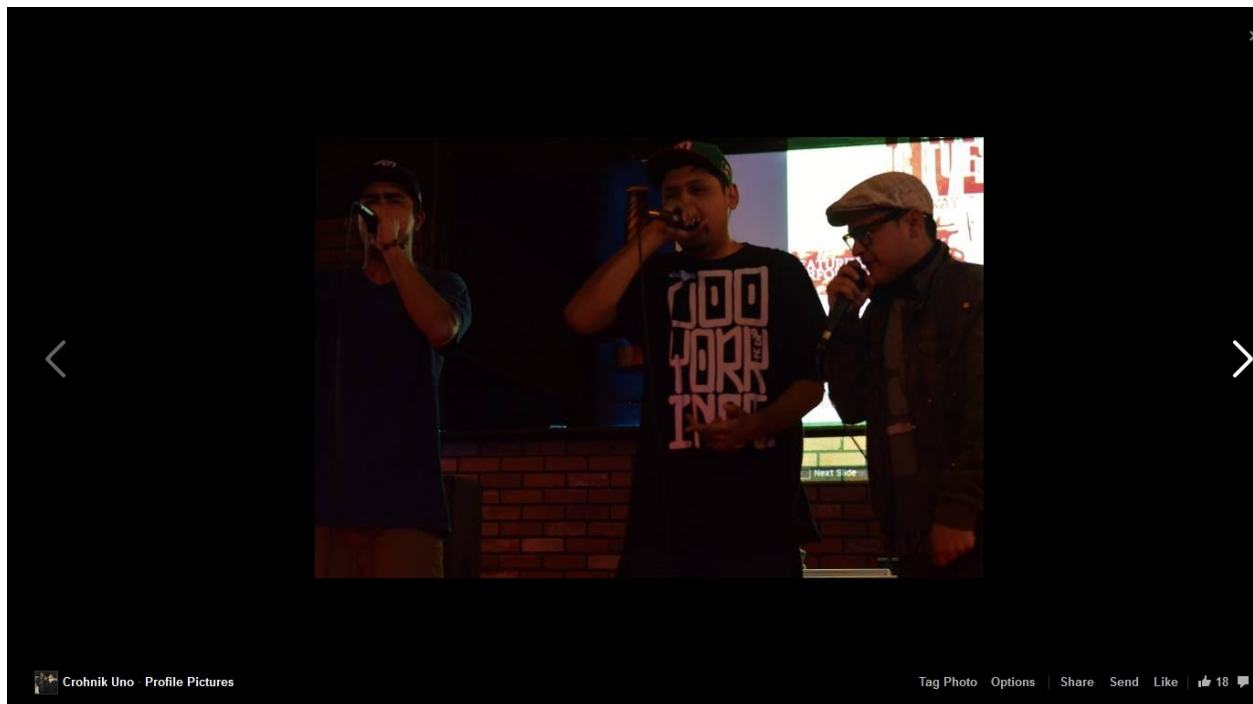


Fig. 9 Saik Uno, Crohnik Uno, & Lack Nicholson (Next Level Records) performance in El Paso, Texas (October 2013).

4.3 What do Juárez MCs do for /within the community that makes them organic intellectuals?

Saldhana (1998) states the organic quality of the intellectual is to be judged by its functional closeness to the basic classes seeking hegemony. Organic intellectuals challenge the hegemony that benefits the dominant social group by promoting the best interests of their people

through active involvement with the people. So during the participant observation and netnography portions of my research, I took special note of what MCs do in their community for the benefit of their people, which counters hegemony at the same time.

Concientizando a la gente primero, que miren el cambio en uno primero. Concientizar, explicandole las cosas y consecuencias del futuro. Hay otro camino que podra ser mas dificil, pero es un camino mas seguro y uno de bien. Hay que demostrar que hay mas opciones, no que te sientas presionado, ya sea porque que tengas recursos bajos or porque vives en barrios marginados, si hay otras opciones. Hay que rascarle, hay que picar piedra, todo es possible. No hay que buscar los recursos faciles, hay que picar piedra y veran que sabra mejor cualquier cosa.----- (Alto a la Violencia, pok37 [video file], 2012)

Raising the awareness of the people comes first. They need to see the change within us first, then more people will start to pay attention. Raising people's awareness, explaining the consequences of the future. We need to show people that there is another path in life other the 'easy way out' by showing them other options than the cartel life. It may be a bit more difficult, but it is a safer and better path. We need to demonstrate to people that just because they are poor and come from marginalized neighborhoods, doesn't make it an excuse for them to choose the life of crime. We have to work the right way, not look for fast money. In the end, it will be better.----- (Alto a la Violencia, Pok37 [video file], 2012)

All of the MCs and producers I spoke with are heavily involved in their community. The collective of Alto a la Violencia held a tour in 2012 to promote their message and music. G-Fone, one of the founders of the collective, describes the significance of the tour below:

Hicimos un tour en el norte del país en 2012. Se trataba de 6 MCs y un DJ con la vision de rescatar a la juventud con nuestra lírica constructiva de Ciudad Juárez para todo Mexico. Estuvimos recorriendo casi todo el norte de nuestro país, donde nos presentamos en Monterrey, Coahuila, Durango, Chihuahua, y tambien salimos en algunas estaciones de radio. Estuvimos contentos por que nos recibió la gente de una manera especial. Hemos estado luchando bastante por este proyecto, de estar allí conviviendo con los jovenes en algunas conferencias y conciertos. Y sobre todo, dandole a conocer a la juventud que estamos peleando, no estamos haciendo una guerra o una protesta, estamos peleando por esos valores, esos principios que se han perdido en las familias. La violencia fisica, emocional, sexual y verbal, es lo que nos ha dejado nuestra ciudad. Tambien es lo que nos ha servido ser mejores personas tambien (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014).

G-Fone explained “we toured the northern half of our country back in 2012. We were 6 MCs and one DJ with one goal, to enlighten the youth with our constructive lyricism. We performed in Monterrey, Coahuila, Durango, Chihuahua, and Ciudad Juárez. We also came out on a few radio stations, we were happy all around because people treated us with so much respect. We’ve worked hard for this project, just to be able to talk to the youth during these concerts and conferences we hold is very gratifying. Most importantly, we are demonstrating to the youth that we are fighting for their family values and morals, those which many families have forgotten about since the escalation of violence. Our city has plagued us with violence, be it physical, emotional, sexual, or verbal; it’s this same violence that has allowed us to become better persons (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014).” G-Fone expresses these

feelings of becoming a better person due to the violence at the end of one of his songs, *Metricas* (2012):

*Tienes de dos,
o sigues hablando de todo lo malo que sucede en Cd. Juárez.
O te pones a hablar de todo lo Bueno que ha estado aconteciendo a causa de la violencia.
Yo miro que hay mas familias unidas.
Yo miro que han buscado mas de Dios.
Yo miro que nos hemos hecho mas fuertes como hermanos.
Y tu que miras? ”” ---Metricas (Alto a la Violencia, 2012)*

You have two options,
Either you keep talking about all the evil that takes place in Ciudad Juárez,
Or you can talk about all the good that's happening as a result of the violence.
I see that more unity amongst families.
I see more people have looked for God.
I see that we've become stronger as a people, as brothers.
What do you see? --- Metricas (Alto a la Violencia, 2012)



Fig. 10 Screenshot of the Alto a la Violencia Tour 2012. Notice their audience is mostly comprised of youth.



Fig. 11 Another screenshot of the Alto a la Violencia Tour 2012. The collective is performing for students during a school assembly.

G-Fone adds:

Creemos en nuestro proyecto porque fomentamos los valores y los principios de las familias. Y sabemos que el joven es mas vulnerable a ser atraído por la delincuencia organizada, por las drogas, por las pandillas...nos hemos enfocado en esta produccion, a traves de nuestros videos y de nuestras conferencias, reivindicar a los jovenes a que crean en mejor futuro. Hemos trabajado en escuelas y conferencias en Cd. Juárez, promoviendo el movimiento. Tambien damos talleres de grabacion para la promocion y capacitacion de los chavos (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014).

He says “the collective believes in their project because they know how vulnerable the youth can be when dealing with organized crime, drug, and gangs. We’ve focused on promoting our

message through our music videos and events. We also work with schools in our city and often host conferences where we help promote family values and principles. We also have workshops on recording music, which help train and promote for the youth (G-Fone, personal communication, April 6, 2014). The Alto a la Violencia collective is currently organizing the Alto a la Violencia Tour 2014.



Fig. 12 Screenshot of the Alto a la Violencia Tour 2014 promotional photo.

Hammer Espada also contributes to the community by visiting drug rehabilitation centers, at-risk youth programs, churches, and jails throughout Cd. Juárez with other members of the Alto a la Violencia collective. Hammer speaks to the youth about his past life and what caused him to change his life on a positive note. He also performs his music, allowing the youth to absorb his message live while he performs. Hammer chooses to speak to kids with drug and gang problems because he once walked the same path as they are. At the end of presentations he offers members

of the audience the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ in their lives. One of Hammer's affiliates recently posted on Facebook:

“El Espíritu Santo acaba de ministrar a una persona del cartel de La Linea de Cd. Juárez por medio de la musica de Hammer Espada y G-Fone del colectivo Alto a la Violencia!” (Hammer Espada, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

“The Holy Spirit just finished speaking to a member of the La Linea cartel of Cd. Juárez through the music of Hammer Espada and G-Fone, from the collective Alto a la Violencia!” (Hammer Espada, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Hammer responded, “Es un gran privilegio ser usados por Dios para tocar los corazones de las personas. Gracias a ustedes, bendiciones.” “It’s a grand privelege to be used by God to touch people’s minds and hearts. Thank you, blessings (Hammer Espada, personal communication, April 9, 2014).”



Fig. 13 Screenshot of Hammer Espada with prisoners of Juárez jail, Cereso.

Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Juvenil (CASA) is an institution dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of the youth in Ciudad Juárez. CASA offers activities and programs that focus on education and involvement in the community. CASA also offers a hip hop program, along with an in-house recording studio to help promote the music made by youth involved in CASA. I briefly spoke with Eric Ponce, one of the coordinators of CASA's hip hop program. He states, "Rap is a device which provides multiple tools, another language with new words for describing a world in which we live. A lot of kids have used it to work through their process of grief, which can be very intense (Eric Ponce, personal communication, January 19, 2014)." Eric is also a member of the rap group called Mera Clase, which includes members of the CASA program. In a song called *Perdonandome Para Perdonar*, a young boy raps about losing his father to the violence and forgiving those who killed him:

*El perdon es la venganza de los Buenos
No dejes que te acabe este veneno,
tenemos un pasado que tenemos que olvidar
Tenemos un futuro que tenemos que anhelar...
Cambio mi vida, cambio mi mente
No veo el pasado, solo vivo en el presente
Mira, que ya no tengo ira
Por que mi padre murio por causa de la violencia
Hoy he llegado a la adolescencia, extraño su presencia
Paz y perdon en el mundo es mi sueno mas profundo
Ahora soy rotundo y yo vengo a perdonar.
-----Perdonandome para perdonar (Mera Clase, 2013)*

Forgiveness is the vengeance of the good,
Don't let this poison get the best of you.
We all have a past to forget
and a future to hope for.
My life's changed and so has my mind.
I don't think about the past because I live for today
Look, I no longer feel anger,
even though my father died due to the violence.
I've grown into adolescence and I miss his presence.
I dream of peace and forgiveness.
Now I am bigger and have come to forgive.

4.4 Key themes within Juárez hip hop

Several key themes among Juárez MCs and their music emerged from the data I gathered from my netnography, interviews, and participant observation. A key theme among Juárez MCs is that they are all victims of cartel violence, where they have been affected personally or someone close to them has. This type of victimization is also a key theme among Juárez MCs and their reasons for becoming MCs. A key theme found in many songs by different artists that is tied to victimization is the shared distrust MCs have for their government, which includes corrupt politicians and police. MCs share common feelings of frustration and anger with their government throughout their songs, allowing listeners to identify themselves through these shared experiences. Another key theme among Juárez MCs is that they all have direct ties to the streets, by which I mean some MCs have experiences with gangs or cartels, others are familiar with the drug trade or drug addiction. They are all deeply rooted in the streets of their neighborhoods because of their past, only now they use these past connections and friendships to help them spread their message and music even more effectively.

I also noticed a common understanding MCs shared as for their function as an MC. They are all aware of the power of the microphone and take it upon themselves to talk about what's going on in the streets of Juárez in order to bring about change. The tone of the music has changed with the passing of the years, with the music acting as a timeline of some sort, where earlier Juárez hip hop, circa 2008-2011, was more about voicing what was going on in Ciudad Juárez by expressing the frustrations and emotions of the citizens of Juárez on song. As the violence began to decrease, circa 2012 (Molloy 2014), the music also changed its focus from describing daily experiences in Ciudad Juárez to offering messages of positivity and change to the youth of the city, in hopes to deter them from the cartel lifestyle. By deterring the youth from

the cartel lifestyle, MCs believe cartel violence will decrease due to a lack of involvement. They are also aware of the dangers their music may attract, like the attention of police or cartels. Regardless, they feel compelled to spread their music and their message as a way of speaking out for a city that has lost its voice and freedom. MCs believe change within the city must begin at an individual level, especially with the youth.

The most important common characteristic among MCs and their music is their concern for the youth of Cd. Juárez. MCs express their concern for the well-being of Juárez youth through their music and action in their community. Each of the MCs I spoke with is active in their community in their own way. For example, Hammer Espada, along with other members of the Alto a la Violencia collective like Mensajero and G-Fone, approach teenagers and young adults in the streets daily; where they show them their music and talk to them about their past lives and mistakes. They also attend local juvenile detention centers, drug rehabilitation centers, church conventions and conferences, school events, and even jail to speak with at-risk youth. Grafiko Rap and Eric Ponce are members of CASA and are involved in youth programs such as CASA's hip hop program. As a collective, Alto a la Violencia attend rehabilitation centers, jails, juvenile detention centers, as well as schools and church community events to perform their music and spread their message of positivity. More importantly, the collective toured throughout Mexico in 2012, spreading their music and positive message to youth from other cities who also live amongst cartel violence; they are currently preparing another tour set for this year as well.

Listeners of Juárez hip hop also share similar qualities to the MCs as well. They dress and speak similar, often using the same slang terms to describe certain places and people of Ciudad Juárez. They are also members of the exclusive online community that is Juárez hip hop, which is how they are able to keep up to date with new music and upcoming events. Listeners

are also victims of cartel violence, where either they or close relatives have been affected personally. They also share a common concern for the city of Ciudad Juárez and often turn to the music as a coping mechanism to the violence. Many listeners I spoke with identify with the messages and emotions in the music and praise these MCs for speaking out for them as a people.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The netnographic methods I used to research Juárez MCs and their music were effective methods for this specific study. Since most Juárez MCs depend on the internet to promote and distribute their music through different music websites and online social networks, most of my initial research consisted of being a member of the exclusive online community of Juárez hip hop. Within this community, I was able to come in contact with several Juárez MCs and their music. Analyzing narratives, performances, and song lyrics of Juárez MCs is also an effective method when investigating Juárez hip hop. The analysis sought to understand Juárez hip hop, not only through the perspectives of MCs and their use of hip hop as resistance to cartel violence, but also through their actions in their community. The narratives contribute to understand the significance of Juárez hip hop as well as its purpose.

Answers to the three previously posed research questions will now be provided, including a discussion of how my findings relate to the literature. In relation to my first and second research questions –What is Juárez hip hop? and –How does Juárez hip hop reflect the ideas and emotions of those who listen to it? The analysis of narratives and song lyrics demonstrated that Juárez hip hop is a subgenre of hip hop music created by Juárez youth as a form of resistance and protest to cartel violence. The music also serves as a coping mechanism for many who have been victims of cartel violence. Juárez hip hop comes from actual citizens of Juárez, who also happen to be actual victims of cartel violence as well. Common themes within the music include shared experiences of victimization due to cartel violence, poverty, and issues with corrupt police. The tone of the music has changed with the years as well, where the music acts as a timeline of some sort; earlier Juárez hip hop, circa 2008-2011, was more about voicing what was going on in Ciudad Juárez by expressing the frustrations and emotions of the citizens of Juárez on song. As

the violence began to decrease, circa 2012 (Molloy 2014), the music also changed its focus from describing daily experiences in Ciudad Juárez to offering messages of positivity and change to the youth of the city, in hopes to deter them from the cartel lifestyle. By deterring the youth from the cartel lifestyle, MCs believe cartel violence will decrease due to a lack of involvement. And although they are fully aware that they will not put an end to cartel violence completely, they are content with the people they have reached and prosper to continue doing the same with future audiences.

Cobb (2007) concludes his book by talking about the future of hip hop. He states, “In the worst-case scenario hip hop may drop into the vast well of commercial mediocrity but it will still inform the musical innovations that are surely to come. What will still remain amazing is the spotlight hip hop shines on otherwise invisible lives.” Cobb explains how the future of hip hop may be in danger of being commodified by a commercial dominant society, diluting hip hop so that it can appeal to a wider audience, becoming ‘mainstream’ hip hop. Cobb discusses how even if hip hop gets commodified entirely, the fact will remain that hip hop is considered as the “spotlight that shines on otherwise invisible lives.” This is especially true with local hip hop, where the perspectives of local MCs shine the spotlight on otherwise invisible lives. Juárez MCs use hip hop music as a healing and coping mechanism by reflecting on common experiences and emotions shared by the citizens of Ciudad Juárez, most which have resulted from cartel violence.

In relation to my final question –What do Juárez MCs do for or within the community that makes them organic intellectuals? Historically, hip hop has served as the voice of the voiceless. Not only does Juárez hip hop serve this same function, but MCs are also transforming the consciousness of their listeners through local community activism. It is through their use of counter-hegemonic lyrics and community activism that allows Juárez MCs to resemble organic

intellectuals. The MCs I spoke with share a common concern for the youth of Ciudad Juárez. They use their music to attract the attention of the youth, especially at-risk youth, offering them a message of positivity and change. They are products of their environment, where most have either been in gangs or worked directly with cartels. Some have sold drugs or have had experiences with drug addiction themselves. They use their past experiences in their music, using themselves as examples to relate with their listeners. These MCs approach people in the streets of Juárez on a daily basis, especially the youth, spreading their music and message to random people throughout the city. They also perform their music and speak with people in drug rehabilitation centers, city jails, juvenile detention centers, schools, church events, and local hip hop events; MCs involved with the Alto a la Violencia collective have even toured major cities throughout Mexico, spreading their message of positivity and change to other audiences who live in similar environments. Many MCs discussed how youth in Ciudad Juárez are more vulnerable to join gangs or cartels due to their environment. Many also claim they mostly target the youth with their message because they once walked the same paths and know more about the consequences than them through their own personal experiences.

To this day, Ciudad Juárez remains a warzone for feuding cartels (Campbell & Hansen, 2013). And although statistics show homicide levels have gone down significantly (Molloy, 2014; Arreola, 2012; Wilkinson, 2014), violence in the city still remains. Juárez MCs continue to ‘report from the frontlines’ in hope for change in their city, and more importantly, the youth. Where earlier Juárez hip hop released during the peak of the drug war was more concerned with being considered as a public outcry for change in Ciudad Juárez, recent Juárez hip hop is more concerned with the rebuilding of the city of Juárez, starting at the individual level, by re-instilling

family values and ideals through their music. By deterring the youth from the cartel lifestyle, they hope this will bring a more positive future to Ciudad Juárez.

What makes Juárez hip hop special is that the MCs are not just making music for the sole purpose of entertainment; they use their music to transform the consciousness of their listeners by relating to them through common experiences and offering them a new path of positivity. Most MCs I spoke with believe change within their city begins with the individual; this is why many MCs also involve themselves in their community, especially with their audience. Using their lives and experiences as examples, these MCs use their music to deter youth from the cartel lifestyle. Since most MCs have strong ties to the streets, it makes it easier for them reach at-risk youth and offer them a positive message because these MCs come from the same environment as them. I feel Juárez hip hop is very uplifting and important to the people of Ciudad Juárez, especially the youth. Although I cannot speak for all of Juárez hip hop, my research and findings have led me to consider that there are some MCs from Ciudad Juárez who I consider organic intellectuals because of their counter-hegemonic lyrics in their music and their involvement in their community.

Saldhana (1998) states the organic quality of the intellectual is to be judged by its functional closeness to the basic classes seeking hegemony. Juárez MCs hold very close ties to their audience, which are mostly teenagers and young adults from working-class families, because they come from the same environment as them and share the same concerns. The organic intellectual serves as a buffer between the influences of ruling class hegemony and the consciousness of the masses by speaking out for the best interest of their class; Juárez MCs serve a similar function by way of their lyrics and activism in their community, especially with the youth. Organic intellectuals also must be able to be organizers of society because of the need to

create the conditions most favorable to the expansion of their own class. Juárez MCs also share this capacity, by use of their counter-hegemonic lyrics and community activism to create the conditions that are most favorable to the expansion of their own class.

One could make the argument that MCs who promote religion and instill family values and traditions of hard work in their music like some members of the *Alto a la Violencia* collective make them hegemonic, due to religion playing such a huge role in cultural hegemonic beliefs. The Juárez MCs in my study are organic intellectuals, regardless if they promote religion or not, because of the audience they reach. These Juárez MCs are speaking to Mexican youth whose culture is heavily influenced by ‘narco-cultura’, which is the drug cartel’s influence on pop culture where drug lords and traffickers are glorified in music, films, and television. Mexican youth live in a society where ‘narco-cultura’ is the dominant culture, its heavy influence has impacted what Mexicans listen to on the radio, what they watch on television, and how they dress and speak. Due to ‘narco-cultura’, Mexican youth are growing up with the idea that the drug trade is a respectable profession and lifestyle because ‘narco-cultura’ allows them to think so. Rather than glorifying drug lords and traffickers in their music like narcocorridos, Juárez MCs use hip hop as an alternative language to educate and transform the consciousness of their listeners. Under the special circumstance that the cultural hegemony in Mexico is heavily influenced by ‘narco-cultura’, I assert that Juárez MCs are organic intellectuals through their use of counter-hegemonic lyrics and action in their community.

There are several Juárez MCs and hip hop groups that I reached out to but was never contacted back or some that I have yet to hear from. Still, those I was fortunate enough to meet and speak with demonstrate that the message in Juárez hip hop is significant. Juárez hip hop not only acts as a coping mechanism for its listeners, it also positively inspires its listeners by

transforming their consciousness and helps them live a more positive life. Juárez MCs take it upon themselves to speak out for the people in their city which live in fear through their music. Their community involvement with at-risk youth and use of counter-hegemonic lyrics makes them organic intellectuals in their society.

Soy rapero que se la pasa predicando con flow, metiendose en carceles, callejones, centros de rehabilitacion, predicando a lo mas vil y menospreciado, cosa que muchos no quieren hacer (Hammer Espada, personal communication, April 11, 2014).

I'm a rapper who spends his time preaching to the youth through flow (raps), entering jails, walking through alleys, and rehabilitation centers, preaching to the most vile and underappreciated persons, something most never do (Hammer Espada, personal communication, April 11, 2014).

The main limitation I had in this study was the fact that researching in Ciudad Juárez was not recommended by the university for safety precautions. Although I was still able to contact and interview some Juárez MCs, I was not able to contact as many as I hoped for. The restriction of not being able to go to Juárez to investigate Juárez hip hop may have hindered my research a bit by not being able to gain a deeper access to the MCs. I could have met more MCs and could have also attended more hip hop events in Mexico. Besides this limitation, I feel the methods I used to gather data were very helpful to this study. The netnography methods I used to research Juárez hip hop and MCs as individuals as well as their music were very helpful in understanding Juárez hip hop. Textual analyses of song lyrics as well as narrative analyses of interviews were also important methods used in this study gain a deeper understanding of Juárez hip hop.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONS FOR JUÁREZ HIP HOP MCs?

1. Tell me where you are from?
 - Describe your upbringing, education level, and what you do for a living (aside from rap).
 - Discuss your parent's income level as well as education.
2. What is your opinion on the current state of Ciudad Juárez?
 - Discuss the violence
 - Are you a victim of the violence?
 - Do you think Juárez is still the 'murder capital of the world?'
3. Please describe your music.
 - What are your musical influences?
 - What do you usually write about?
 - How has the violence affected/influenced your music?
 - Why do you feel compelled to talk about what happens in your city?
 - How can people find your music?
 - Do you think your music could make a difference?
 - Are you scared of your music reaching the cartels?
4. Are there any things you do for or within the community?
5. Is there something else you'd like to add that could help me better understand Juárez hip hop?

QUESTIONS FOR PRODUCERS AND PROMOTERS?

1. What is your opinion on the current state of Ciudad Juárez?
 - Do you think the violence has decreased or has it remained at a steady pace?
 - Do you think this affects the music?
2. Who listens to Juárez hip hop?
 - Does the listening audience consist of people from both sides of the border?
 - Or primarily from Mexico?
 - Do you find connections between hip hop and corridos?

3. What does the music stand for?

- Are there any common themes or stories among Juárez hip hop artists?
- What or who are they about?

4. Does Juárez hip hop contain any 'messages' or content about the social situation in Juárez?

5. How do people access Juárez hip hop?

6. Where are hip hop events held? And why?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add that could help me better understand Juárez hip hop?

QUESTIONS FOR LISTENERS OF JUÁREZ HIP HOP

(For use at hip hop events/concerts)

1. Is this your first time at a hip hop event?

- How did you hear about it?

2. Where do you find the local hip hop you listen to?

- On the radio?
- Online?
- Local shops?

3. Do you know of other Juárez hip hop artists?

4. What do you like most about Juárez hip hop?

- The music itself?
- The lyrics?
- The performer?

5. Why do you listen to Juárez hip hop?

- Do you think the music 'speaks' for you?
- How does the music make you feel?
- Does the music serve as a coping mechanism for cartel violence?

5. Where do you live?

- El Paso?
- Juárez?

6. Have you or a loved one ever been a victim of cartel violence?

APPENDIX II

Juárez Hip Hop MCs

- *Alto a la Violencia.....<https://soundcloud.com/gfone>
- *Axe Kamikaze.....<https://soundcloud.com/axer-kamikaze>
- *G-Fone.....<https://soundcloud.com/gfone>
- *Hammer Espada.....<https://soundcloud.com/hammer-espada>
- *Crohnik Uno.....<https://soundcloud.com/crohuno>
- *Saik Uno.....<https://soundcloud.com/saikuno>
- *Eric Ponce.....<https://soundcloud.com/casapjtunes>
- *Grafiko Rap.....<https://soundcloud.com/filos-klandestinos>
- *Pok37.....<https://soundcloud.com/pock372009>
- *MC Crimen.....<https://soundcloud.com/crimen-7>

Juárez Hip Hop producers

- *Lack Nicholson.....<https://soundcloud.com/lack-nicholson-l-s-beats>
- *Mensajero.....<https://soundcloud.com/gfone>
- *Crohnik Uno.....<https://soundcloud.com/crohuno>

Juárez Hip Hop websites

- *Hype..... <https://www.facebook.com/HYPELIFESTYLE>
- *Noise.....<https://www.facebook.com/noisepromotora?fref=ts>
- *Juárez rap blog.....<http://rapJuárez.blogspot.mx/>
- *CASA Juvenil Promocion.....<http://www.casapj.org>

CURRICULUM VITA

Daniel Sanchez was born in El Paso, Texas. The first son of Maria Martinez and Daniel Sanchez, he graduated from Silva Health Magnet High School, El Paso, Texas in Spring 2002. Daniel is the first university graduate of his family, he has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a minor in Psychology from the University of Texas at El Paso. In May 2014, he will graduate with a Master's of Arts in Sociology from the University of Texas at El Paso. Daniel is dedicated to working with at-risk youth, using his life experiences as well as hip hop to help mentor youth.

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