

RE-INTERPRETING MEXICAN ROCK MUSIC:  
CONTEMPORARY YOUTH, POLITICS, AND THE MEXICAN STATE

by

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Re-Interpreting Mexican Rock Music: Contemporary Youth, Politics, and the Mexican State

Thesis directed by Professor Robert Trager

This dissertation elaborates a theoretical intervention challenging accepted interpretations of the role of rock music in youth political expression and identity formation during the period following the Mexican government's *apertura*, or opening, from the 1980s through the 2000s, a period that followed decades of censorship and tight government control of youth expression, popular culture, and national identity.

In spite of the fact that youth under the age of twenty-four make up approximately forty-five percent of Mexico's population, young people and their engagement with and creation of popular culture have been severely understudied. This dissertation argues that while previous research has brought attention to a population that deserves to be studied, much of it has employed theoretical lenses that take too much for granted: perceiving the use and meaning of rock music to young people as inherently resistant, defiant, oppositional, and confrontational; and understanding rock's fans as a discrete, identifiable, unified, and subordinate social group that is necessarily in conflict with an equally identifiable dominant group.

This dissertation employs an interpretive approach to the study of Mexican rock music that strips away assumptions that organize analysis into predictable frameworks. Instead, following recent global media studies scholarship, select popular music studies scholars, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz, this project places data gathered from informants via interviews, observation, and documentary analysis into broader webs of significance and views human behavior as symbolic action. This research has revealed that rock music's role in youth politics has been widely varied over the past thirty years – occasionally raising consciousness and prescribing avenues for social change, but more frequently (though equally important) providing a means of escape and disconnect from Mexico's increasingly violent and hostile social world.

This work is significant as a critical, diachronic account of an important, mediated popular cultural form that is examined contextually, relationally, and while considering audiences, texts, and production in analysis.

## Dedication

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This project is joyfully and respectfully dedicated to the creators, producers, performers, promoters, advocates, and enthusiasts of rock music in Mexico!

It is also dedicated, in loving memory, to my recently departed grandparents,

Dorothy Fitzgerald, Lucy Red FitzPatrick, and Arthur Red.

## Acknowledgements

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I was first inspired to examine Mexico's popular music during my senior year in college when I undertook a yearlong historical study of mariachi and national identity. Julio Moreno and Michael Stanfield supported that work and also offered me the first encouragements to embark on an academic career. It took me many years to heed their advice and I can only hope that the life experiences accumulated along the way will make me a better scholar and teacher.

I have been fortunate to have been encouraged and supported by many teachers along the way. In addition to Julio and Mike from the USF days, Charlie Hale and Craig Watkins were great mentors while I wrote my M.A. thesis at the University of Texas at Austin. While at the University of Colorado, I learned a lot about teaching from Janice Peck, Polly McLean, and Alison Jaggard. Other faculty members contributed to my intellectual advancement both as teachers and committee members. I am deeply grateful to Trager, Nabil Echchaibi, Isaac Reed, Rob Buffington, and Shu-Ling Berggreen for accompanying me on this journey with enthusiasm, encouragement, and trust in my abilities.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the work of scholars and advocates of youth and rock music in Mexico. Their work deserves to be recognized more widely and extended productively.

\* \* \*

Without question, my family and friends have also helped make this dissertation possible. My parents, Sheila Red and Richard Red, have always supported and encouraged me even when they didn't have any idea what I was up to or why I was doing it. I have appreciated their unflagging support from the first time I decided to live in Mexico City in 1998, when I was still a teenager, to my more recent forays that coincided with devastating tales of danger and violence. I am also thankful to my more recently acquired parents, Joy and Denny Swanson, for their kindness, cheer, and the kids-ski-free program. Many thanks to Marc Swanson for being an entertaining brother-in-law who is always up for a good argument. And special appreciation to Uncle Wayne whose generosity has made this entire journey markedly smoother.

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

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Mexico is an intensely musical country. Wherever you go you hear music: it streams out of storefronts to attract customers; it is played on the streets in genres as diverse as *ranchera* (what mariachi bands play) and hip hop, and with instruments as varied as accordions and ten-gallon buckets *cum* tom drums; it is utilized by street performers as they reenact indigenous dances, juggle fire, or breakdance; it accompanies passengers as they ride public transportation, loudly pumped out of buses and played by informal vendors on the subway; at neighborhood restaurants, diners may choose from a variety of live musicians who pass by and offer their repertoire of *trova*, *bolero*, or some other form of *música romántica* to set the tone for the meal; and at night, clubs, bars, and discotheques come alive with music to suit almost any mood, any taste culture, or any dance style. While large, urban areas have the most (and most diverse) offerings, small, rural towns often provide the most unusual and idiosyncratic interpretations of musical trends (the Northern Mexico penchant for pointy boots, “botas picudas,” and “tribal” music being today’s most remarkable example).

When I first lived in Mexico City and Guadalajara in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Spanish language rock music that combined traditional instrumentation and rhythms with Anglo rock from the United States and the United Kingdom was most *en vogue* (second only to highly commercial pop which is seemingly ubiquitous the world over).<sup>1</sup> Compellingly, public group rituals around rock music were difficult to avoid at the time: late at night, bars, restaurants, clubs, and other venues that played rock music would turn into mass sing-

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<sup>1</sup> Today’s Korean K-Pop is a telling example.

alongs. When Spanish language rock came on, entire crowds would burst into collective song, individuals would wrap their arms around their neighbors, throw their heads back to belt out choruses, and gaze meaningfully at one another to convey how deeply felt the lyrics were. Songs included popular *rock en español* (rock in Spanish) from Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico, but when they were sung *en masse* their meaning had more to do with the present moment, the here and now, the collective experience, and the (imagined) shared memories than the national origin of the track. Interestingly, the songs that prompted these group rituals were not necessarily new, nor were they “oldies” that invoked nostalgia for some bygone past (as *ranchera* songs are when sung collectively in mariachi clubs). Instead, these rock songs had become popular sometime in the previous ten to twelve years (i.e., since the late 1980s). For the young people who filled the bars, those with leisure time on Friday or Saturday nights and a bit of money to spend, these were the songs they had grown up with; this was the rock music that had shaped their generation, their lives. While the fact that the music was significant was clear to any casual observer, what these rituals were all about, what this *music* was all about was more obscure.

By late 2002, when I conducted fieldwork on the ska<sup>2</sup> subculture in Mexico City, it had become difficult to find bars and restaurants where the rock, group karaoke just described still took place. A handful of bars became known for *creating* the kind of atmosphere in which the collective sing-alongs had once taken place spontaneously, organically.<sup>3</sup> It was also increasingly difficult to find Spanish language rock music that utilized traditional Mexican rhythms and offered commentary on Mexican social and political

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<sup>2</sup> Ska is a genre of music that first developed in Jamaica in the 1950s and was a precursor to reggae and dance hall. It had a resurgence in popularity when it arrived with Jamaican immigrants to the UK in the 1970s and was mixed with white, British popular music of the time. Its so-called “third wave” hit the Americas in the mid-1990s, but while its staying power was limited in the US, it has maintained its relevance in Mexico and much of Latin America to this day.

<sup>3</sup> The Bebotero bar/restaurants in Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta are stellar examples.

life – the three elements that had been at the heart of Mexican rock since the mid-1980s. By 2007, American studies and music scholar Josh Kun wrote in *The New York Times*:

In the 1990s to be an alternative rocker in Mexico City usually meant a few specific things. You made music about the unchecked chaos of your home megalopolis. You threw the occasional lyrically coded stone at corrupt politicians and corporate media clowns. You embraced traditional Mexican music but then turned it inside out using ska or hip-hop or your favorite goth moments from the Cure. And most important of all you sang in Spanish. You made music that had its ears open to the world but that could have come only from Mexico City. A decade later the city's musical ethos couldn't be more different (Kun 2007).

What had happened? Kun, who also wrote about *rock en español* in his 2005 book, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Kun 2005), suggested the shift was attributable mainly to technological changes (namely, digitization), globalization, and the fact that these elements permitted independent music scenes to cross-pollinate in unprecedented ways (Kun 2007). But literature on Mexico's rock scene had, since the late 1980s, characterized Mexican rock as rebellious, anti-establishment, contentious, and overtly political.<sup>4</sup> Attributing the absence of these components to technological shifts seemed incomplete and decidedly over-determined.

Prompted by personal experiences and Kun's intriguing 2007 article, I began this dissertation with the intention of uncovering what had happened to overtly political Mexican rock. Since Mexico's rock music has always been intimately connected to Mexican youth and because it typically has been perceived as oppositional to the state, Mexican rock promised to be a compelling vehicle through which to examine the relationship between a highly mediated form of popular culture, young people, and the state. The "state" in Mexico is of particular interest because, for seventy years (1930-2000), the PRI, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), had maintained semi-authoritarian control of the state, and had utilized mass media and popular culture to unify the nation and to *create*

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<sup>4</sup> This literature will be reviewed in detail in the following chapter.

its national identity. Therefore, examining Mexico's rock music – a mass mediated, popular culture form supposedly at odds with the PRI – and its relationship to the state would be a fruitful area of inquiry. Furthermore, the coincidence of the fall of the PRI in 2000 and the apparent disappearance of overtly political rock music around that same time aroused my curiosity. Certainly the demise of the PRI had not resolved all of the political issues that had served as themes for Mexico's *rock en español* – institutional crises, corruption, greed, deep inequality, lack of educational and employment opportunities. So, again, what had happened to Mexico's political rock?

## The Project

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### *Objectives*

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This dissertation has two principle objectives. First, it seeks to provide an historical overview of contemporary, popular Mexican rock music from the time of its re-emergence in the 1980s to the present. In so doing, it has identified three periods, or phases, of contemporary Mexican rock, each of which is described in detail in chapters four, five, and six. These chapters situate Mexico's rock music in the political, economic, and social contexts of the given period. Each chapter then examines how Mexico's young people<sup>5</sup> have experienced the period and how they have been perceived both by the state and scholars of Mexican youth. Next, Mexican rock music's primary musical and lyrical characteristics are described. Each chapter then explains the role of the mass media in the trajectory of Mexican rock. Each of the chapters concludes by explaining how these four elements are connected with one another and how they contribute to our understanding of the relationship between Mexican rock music, youth, and the state.

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term “young people” is defined following Mexican government statistics as 12-29 years old (CNNMexico 2011).

The second objective of this dissertation is to address what happened to political Mexican rock from the time of its re-emergence in the 1980s to the present. As chapter two will make clear, relatively little academic attention has been paid to Mexico's rock music and when scholarship has been undertaken rock has been assumed to have a very particular character, role, and use for its listeners. This dissertation breaks with this tendency and argues that Mexico's rock music has had different roles at different times during the last thirty years. At moments, it has been used as a tool for political expression among marginalized youth, while at other moments it has been wielded to demand attention for young people and to carve out space for creative expression. Additionally, on the one hand it has periodically sought to redefine "mexicanidad," or Mexicanness, and reshape national identity, while on the other hand it has been the means of participation in global conversations about modernity and cosmopolitanism. Therefore, what Mexican rock means to fans, musicians, and industry professionals and how these actors use it has varied over time.

This dissertation draws on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz and utilizes a Geertzian framework for analysis. Though this will be described in more detail in chapter two, in short, this dissertation understands Mexican rock music to be a cultural phenomenon assembled by social actors as a representation of their social world; one medium among many to display the real-life themes that are important to them; and a window which we as cultural interpreters use in order to understand and explain the social world. This framework is further informed by popular music scholarship that calls on researchers to examine popular music as *texts* that are *produced* and received by *audiences*, and acknowledges the importance of all three of these dimensions. Additionally, scholars of popular music and global media insist mediated cultural forms, such as Mexico's rock music, must be examined

within their political, economic, social, and historical contexts. So while a Geertzian frame is utilized as the scaffolding for this dissertation, its structure is filled in through the use of popular music scholarship and global media studies theory.

### *Defining the Object, Period, and Place of Study*

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The central object of study for this dissertation is Mexico's rock music. That is, music created by bands or artists that call Mexico home and whose music is intended (at least initially) for a local, Mexican audience. "Rock," a notoriously difficult genre for popular music scholars to define (Frith 1996; Turino 2008), is understood broadly and primarily relies on previous literature on Mexican rock music, as well as what informants deem "rock" to be. While the lines that demarcate rock from other genres (pop or hip hop, for example) are admittedly ambiguous, research conducted for this dissertation has revealed that there is considerable consensus regarding which bands are considered to fit squarely inside the "rock" box.<sup>6</sup> For the scholars, industry professionals, musicians, fans, and journalists consulted for this project, there was indelible consistency – rock is typically rhythm and blues derived, guitar and drum driven, and melodic. As journalist Ernesto Lechner notes, "Any *rock en español* fan worth his [sic] salt, will tell you that neither [Mexico's Maná nor Colombia's Shakira] belongs in the defiantly unique aesthetic of the movement" (Lechner 2006: xii). And while I do not take Mexican rock to be equivalent with *rock en español* because, as will become clear in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, that label refers to a particular period of Mexico's rock, Lechner's point is relevant. It is also important to note that this project is focused specifically on mass mediated, popular rock. Rather than

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<sup>6</sup> Mexico's Maná, for example, though well-known, impossibly prolific, and regularly recognized by both the Grammy's and the Latin Grammy's as a "rock" or "Latin alternative" band was roundly dismissed as pop by informants, including rock music fans, journalists, music industry professionals, and musicians (personal interviews 2010-2011).

examining underground rock music, it looks at rock music that is widely accessible, available on the radio, television (even if only occasionally), performed live, and generally a well-known part of the national musical landscape.

This study examines the period from 1980 to the present. As will be discussed in detail below, Mexico's rock music re-emerged in the 1980s after a period of forced marginality and overt government repression. Since that time it has changed and evolved; seeing how it did so, and how it came to be what it is today is a central objective of this project. In order to understand "what happened to Mexico's rock music," it is necessary to examine it from early in its trajectory and, because of its forced silence throughout the 1970s, exploring its content and its context at the time of its re-emergence is a particularly interesting place to begin.

Mexico is a large and diverse country; therefore, speaking of *Mexico's* rock music is somewhat problematic. There are in fact "many Mexicos"<sup>7</sup> and many rock music scenes in the country. Still, Mexico City "es el centro que monopoliza las actividades económicas, políticas y culturales más importantes del país, de ahí que sea el foco de irradiación hacia el interior de la República" ("is the center that monopolizes the most important economic, political and cultural activities of the country, hence it is the center that radiates toward the interior of the Republic") (Torres Medina 2002: 19).<sup>8</sup> Because of Mexico City's importance as the political, economic, and cultural hub of Mexico, this dissertation focuses on it as a locality that is highly capable of revealing a great deal about the country more generally. This strategy is not unprecedented; many of the texts referenced for this project also utilize it

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<sup>7</sup> *Many Mexicos* is the title of a book by Lesley Byrd Simpson first published in 1941 and, although that is the first reference I can find to the idea of "many Mexicos" or "muchos Mexicos," it has become a commonplace when speaking of the country and its diversity (Simpson 1966).

<sup>8</sup> This and all subsequent translations are by the author.

(Paredes Pacho 1992; García Canclini 2001; Torres Medina 2002; *Nuestro Rock* 2004); it is in these footsteps that this dissertation follows.

### *Methods and Methodologies*

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Given the decades-long period covered in this project, a variety of methods were employed in order to more fully understand Mexico's rock music and its relationship with young people and the state. Here they are described as two layers, the first included historical and textual analysis; the second employed ethnographic methods. Each is described below.

#### A. Layer One – Historical and Textual Analysis

This dissertation used historical analysis following historian Javier Auyero's approach in *Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests, and the Quest for Recognition* (Auyero 2003). In the text, Auyero begins with historical analysis and then incorporates archival research, careful readings of personal diaries, newspaper accounts, and interviews into his research. Auyero follows in a social scientific tradition that emphasizes storytelling and its use "as a window into (but not a mirror of) the meanings of extremely diverse collective and individual practices" (ibid.: 11). Consequently, in his telling of the story Auyero divides the book into two parts, each highlighting one of the women and one of the protests. He first describes the protest and the woman's role in it and then gives a biography of the woman, tying her biography to her participation and to an interpretation of the event. He privileges the accounts the two women give about their experiences, but does not limit his interpretations to their words. Instead, he uses other sources in order to go deeper and to better understand the context of the women's stories. Similarly, the research design employed for this project examined newspapers, magazines, and fanzines as informative historical documents that assisted in providing context for informants' accounts.

A study of Mexico's rock music would not be complete without an analysis of the music itself. In his 2007 article, music scholar Marek Korczynski looks at how the social context of music listening influences how music is used and what music means for listeners (Korczynski 2007). Most of his data is gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, but Korczynski also insists on the value of lyrical analysis. By asking informants for the names of songs that speak to them about their work experiences, Korczynski identifies a list of songs for analysis. He examines the lyrics of these songs, identifies themes, and categorizes them. Through this process Korczynski is able to corroborate informants' statements and strengthen his own conclusions. For this dissertation I employed a similar tactic: I consulted with informants regarding the most important artists and the most influential songs during given periods. I combined this information with careful reading of the historical documents described above to select songs for lyrical analysis.

### B. Layer Two – Ethnographically Informed Approach

Thomas Lindlof and Bryan Taylor explain that while quantitative research is very linear and theory driven, qualitative research is known for being inductive and emergent. Researchers shy away from predicting how the study will turn out. From broad exploratory beginnings, qualitative researchers move to more directed data collection and analysis. The process is generally cyclical, with methods being utilized over and over again until the researcher has gathered everything she feels she can, given resource constraints. For a researcher, each scene is unique and dynamic, calling for flexible strategies (Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 66-67). Ethnography is a type of qualitative research that encompasses the use of many data gathering techniques (such as interviews, observation, and participant observation) conducted in a specific field, or location of study. Anthropologist Clifford

Geertz recommends ethnography as a way of getting at what the import of human behavior is, what “is getting said” through symbolic action (Geertz 1973: 10). In a similar vein, music scholar Tia DeNora insists that when studying what she calls “The Musical Event,” a researcher must look at what music “affords.” As DeNora explains, the concept of affordance:

posits music as something acted with and acted upon. It is only through this appropriation that music comes to “afford” things, which is to say that music’s affordances, while they might be anticipated, cannot be pre-determined but rather depend upon how music’s “users” connect music to other things; how they interact with and in turn act upon music as they have activated it (DeNora 2000: 48).

In order to find out how music’s users connect with, interact with, and act upon music, ethnographic methods are extremely useful. This project, while not a true ethnography, is inspired by the methodology and, therefore, conducted exploratory fieldwork for one week in both July 2008 and October 2009, while more formal fieldwork took place for four weeks in September 2010 and for two weeks in April 2011.

Lindlof and Taylor describe the need for a researcher to negotiate access to informants and to a field of study in general. Some people act as gatekeepers and control access to a given research site (Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 101). Speaking to a “gatekeeper,” in this case the individuals who run different music venues, enhanced observation in small, concert settings, for example. These people provided important insight, contextual information, direction, and parameters for my activity while in the spaces. Lindlof and Taylor also refer to “sponsors” who serve as key informants that are “in the know” and who can help facilitate contacts and open doors in various research settings (ibid.: 104). My research benefitted from a few “sponsors” whose knowledge of the field and extensive access to other well-positioned informants was invaluable.

Anthropologists Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack remind researchers of the importance of learning to listen to informants without jumping to conclusions and attempting to fit their words into a theoretical framework while conducting an interview (Anderson and Jack 1991: 19). The value and importance of this kind of interviewing is to pay attention to how people “define and evaluate their experiences *in their own terms*” (ibid.: 23, emphasis added). Qualitative researcher Irving Seidman writes, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.... At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth” (Seidman 1991: 3). Thirty-four people were interviewed for this project. Most of these were individual interviews, conducted in private settings. Several were done in small groups at a major music festival. In accord with the University of Colorado’s Institutional Review Board and the particular protocol for this project, all interviewees will remain anonymous throughout this dissertation. Quotations attributed to interviewees are indicated by the generic “personal interview” citation and the year. In cases where multiple interviewees shared similar information the plural form, “personal interviews,” is used.

In addition to interviews, this study also employed observation. Observation took place in public and semi-public settings. A few concert venues were identified as research sites. El Multiforo Alicia, El Imperial, and El Under, all located in Mexico City, were valuable locations for meeting informants. Additionally, El Chopo, a rock music and paraphernalia flea market in Mexico City, was an important observation site. Sociologist Erving Goffman explains that while observing, as a researcher “[y]ou’re artificially forcing yourself to be tuned into something that you then pick up as a witness – not as an interviewer, not as a listener, but as a witness to how they react to what gets done to and

around them” (Goffman 1989: 126). For this dissertation, jottings were taken to track this witnessing and the observations made in the field. A field journal recording daily events was also kept.

Summarizing the contributions of several prominent music scholars, Korczynski points out that studies of popular music audiences are very rare, especially in the context of everyday life (as compared to the activities of subcultures) (Korczynski 2007: 258). DeNora pushes this further calling on researchers to look not just at how audiences interpret music, but how they use it *in situ* (DeNora 2000: 44-45). DeNora insists researchers pay attention to extra-musical “things” (specifically biography and memory) that contribute to music’s use and meaning for individuals (ibid.). Conducting interviews and observations with individuals connected to Mexico’s rock music scene are ways to answer the calls of both Korczynski and DeNora and to fill a gap in popular music scholarship. As this research overview indicates, interviews and observation alone are not sufficient and were coupled with the historical and textual analyses described above in order to paint a fuller, more textured, and nuanced account of the relationship between Mexico’s rock music, young people, and the state from 1980 to the present.

### C. Conducting Cross-Cultural Research and Accounting for the Researcher

Social scientists and anthropologists in particular have debated the significance of the role of the researcher in ethnographic research. Ethnography often, though not exclusively, involves a researcher of one culture investigating people and a way of life of another. Even when a researcher comes from the community she is studying, her training and education can serve to separate her from her informants. Questions arise regarding the intentions of the researcher, who the research is for, who writes it up, who benefits from it, and how it may be harmful (Smith 1999: 10). As such, a number of issues emerge that require careful

consideration, including: the researcher's status as an outsider, how power relations influence research (the process and its findings), and the role the researcher's demographic markers (or perceptions thereof) have in shaping the research.

Some scholars have discussed the importance of incorporating both an *emic* and an *etic* perspective into ethnographic research. *Emic* is the view or perspective of a person inside or native to the culture being studied, while the *etic* perspective is considered a culturally neutral description of a person or thing derived from disciplinary knowledge or theory (Babie 2007: 291; Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 81). These terms become problematic when it is assumed that a researcher can speak entirely from an emic perspective one moment and an etic perspective the next, switching back and forth seamlessly (albeit after much practice and familiarity with a given place) (Babie 2007: 291). An alternative to an emic/etic approach is to acknowledge that as multifaceted individuals we are always many selves at once. We bring the multiple parts of ourselves to our analyses and our analyses are both shaped by us and shape us.<sup>9</sup> But while the self of the researcher is multifaceted and may experience change and confusion while conducting fieldwork, as an outsider the researcher is capable of providing insight into and explanations of social worlds that are different from her own. Mikhail Bakhtin sums up this position effectively:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy idea that in order to better understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture... of course, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything enriching.... In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative

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<sup>9</sup> Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont put it well: "Roles are created, managed, and maintained over the course of prolonged fieldwork. Fieldwork is not a passive activity. We actively engage in identity (re)construction, and this is not simply an instrumental process. The actual lived experience of conducting fieldwork confronts, disrupts, and troubles the self... fieldwork can reconstruct, restore, or rewire identity and sense of self; fragment or challenge the self; and provide new and different ways of understanding the self" (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003: 54-55).

understanding—in time, in space, in culture.... We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depth (quoted in Marcus 1999: 96).

Even if one is comfortable with the role of cultural outsider, a researcher must still negotiate the rugged terrain of power relations. Inherent in any relationship between a researcher and her informants are relations of power that can influence the research process and its findings. In the case of a researcher from a wealthy, privileged, Western country doing research in a “developing,” or non-Western country, it is often the case that the researcher wields considerably more power (in terms of access to economic, political, and legal resources) than research participants. Anthropologist George Marcus, however, argues that the researcher’s position cannot be *presumed* to be more favorable (Marcus 1999: 100-101). This project included interviews with musicians and rock music producers who in many cases had more economic resources, relevant cultural capital, and cachet than I. Given Mexico’s very large poor and working class populations and relatively small middle and upper class sectors, I also conducted interviews with people with fewer financial resources than I have. In addition to critical reflexivity, one way scholars have attempted to account for power inequities is through reciprocity. While the research design utilized for this project did not provide any financial incentives for participation, relaxed openness and eagerness to learn from informants typically led to gratifying conversation and dialogue during formal and informal interviews and seemed to assuage the discomfort that can accompany unequal power relations. In most cases, because interviewees were talking about their preferences and opinions about Mexico’s rock music in a non-threatening and safe scenario they were eager to share, open to questions, and excited by the opportunity to discuss something about which they were passionate.

While class and cultural capital are important factors shaping how power relations play out, so too are gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality. These demographic markers were expected to be the most significant for this research project (as compared with physical ability, marital status, sexuality, etc.). Prior experience indicated that being a white female in the predominately mestizo male environment of Mexican rock music creates certain challenges and opportunities. Unable to “blend in” under these circumstances I sometimes attracted attention, which occasionally led to important contacts. I had been concerned that the inability to go unnoticed may have garnered unwanted and unsolicited attention that could get in the way of fieldwork, but this was not the case. Additionally, as exploratory trips to Mexico foreshadowed, my status as a US American was not particularly significant to interviewees. Instead, conducting research on Mexican rock music raised more eyebrows and generated more curiosity and confusion than my nationality.

Finally, it is important to have heightened awareness of one’s impact on a scene and to engage in careful reflection on the many ways a researcher’s status as an outsider, inequitable power relations in the research process, and a researcher’s identity markers can all shape our experiences in the field and our findings. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith provides a code of conduct of sorts for doing research with the Maori people that is applicable across cultures:

1. Respect people
2. Present yourself to people face to face
3. Look, listen... [then] speak
4. Share and host people, be generous
5. Be cautious
6. Do not trample over the *mana* [spirit, way of life, heart] of people
7. Don’t flaunt your knowledge (Smith 1999: 120).

These seven points were taken as edicts and carried with me from the early stages of research design, during fieldwork, and throughout the final stages as findings were written up and as they were presented in the following pages.

## What Lies Ahead

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Chapter two, “Reviewing the Literature and Identifying Foundations,” provides an overview of the primary bodies of literature that have informed this dissertation: popular music studies; rock music studies in Mexico; youth studies in Mexico; and media and cultural studies in Latin America. The chapter explains this dissertation’s use of a Geertzian frame and how that frame is consistent with innovations in global media studies scholarship and, therefore, particularly relevant for this project.

Chapter three, “The Post-Revolutionary State: Shaping National Identity via Popular Culture,” describes the relationship between the state, popular culture, and mass media during Mexico’s post-Revolutionary period, specifically from the 1920s through the 1960s. It then explains rock music’s arrival into this context; how it was perceived by young people, as well as by the state; and the national identity crisis gripping Mexico in the late 1960s as the government and the citizenry became increasingly divided and suspect of one another.

Chapter four, “The Re-birth of Homegrown Rock: Fighting for the Right to Exist (1980-1988),” is the first of three chapters that chronicle Mexico’s rock music, the political, economic, and social contexts of the period, the situation for Mexico’s youth at the time, the characteristic styles and sounds of the music, and the role of the mass media in the music’s trajectory. Following the same format, chapter five examines the second phase, “The Consolidation of Mexican Rock: Identity and the Boom (1988-1997),” while chapter six focuses on “The Paradox of Mexican Rock: Saturation and Fragmentation (1997-present).”

Chapter seven, “Findings: Mexican Rock, Youth, Politics, and the State,” describes this dissertation’s findings and analyzes them using relevant popular music scholarship, global media studies theory, and prominent literature on Mexico’s rock music. Finally, chapter eight offers concluding remarks, discusses the contributions and limitations of this study, and suggests areas for future research.

### Why This Project Matters

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Many research projects that take a form of popular culture as their object of analysis are concerned with how the use, consumption, or creation of that form might resist the status quo. For those interested in youth cultures, subcultures, groups, or tribes, the articulation of resistance in the form of overt opposition or alternative ways of being can become the focus for the researcher. As chapter two describes in more detail, many popular music scholars, as well as chroniclers of Mexico’s rock music, begin from the position that culture is a terrain of struggle between dominant and subordinate social groups (typically determined by class or a broader conceptualization of socio-economic status). Thus positioned, actions, behaviors, or statements from any group take on particular and predictable meanings. This kind of approach can lead researchers to certain conclusions without their being grounded in evidence. This dissertation posits that rather than assuming the meaning of actions, behaviors, or statements a priori, research must *discern* these meanings.

The importance of this project is to improve our understanding of the relationship between Mexican rock – the music itself, musicians, fans, promoters, and producers – politics, the Mexican state, and Mexican society at large. Current scholarship limits our understandings of these relationships because it takes too much for granted: perceiving rock

as inherently resistant, defiant, oppositional, and confrontational; and understanding rock's adherents as a discrete, identifiable, unified, and subordinate social group that is necessarily in conflict with an equally identifiable dominant group. A Geertzian framework and an interpretive approach to the study of Mexican rock music strip away assumptions that organize analysis into predictable frameworks. Instead, drawing on the contributions of Geertz, popular music studies, and global media studies, this dissertation attempts to return us to "what our informants are up to, or think they are up to" (Geertz 1973: 15). Placing data gathered from informants into broader webs of significance and viewing human behavior as symbolic action (*ibid.*: 10), provides the means to draw conclusions about the social role of culture. It is not until this work is done that we can concretely see what Mexican rock music means to social actors and to what uses it is put.

Additionally, the theoretical foundations of this dissertation (described in chapter two), particularly the contributions of global media studies, expand our analysis of Mexican rock music and assist us in understanding it as caught up in global cultural, political, economic, and ideological currents. It is impossible to think of Mexico (or any country) as disconnected from global forces of capital and culture; Mexico's popular cultural forms should therefore not be divorced from them either.

Complementing these theoretical foundations, this chapter has also laid out a two-layer, multi-method research design for the study of Mexican rock music, its uses and meanings for those connected with it, and how these (uses and meanings) are related to the Mexican state. The first layer examined texts utilizing historical and content analysis. Looking at accounts of Mexican rock music and coverage in magazines, fanzines, and newspaper articles has provided me with the local, national, and to some degree global context for Mexico's rock music scene. The second layer turned to the people for whom

rock music is important using ethnographically-inspired methods to examine both culture in practice (via fans and promoters) and cultural production (via musicians and producers). Finally, attention has been paid to some common concerns that arise regarding the role of the researcher when conducting cross-cultural research. By bringing together the theoretical and methodological plans articulated above, this dissertation asks: What is the relationship between Mexican rock music, young people, and the Mexican state from 1980 to the present?

## Chapter II

### Reviewing the Literature and Identifying Foundations

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Several bodies of literature and theoretical influences have shaped this dissertation. This chapter identifies many of these while it also attempts to synthesize the literature that is most directly relevant to the study of contemporary Mexican rock music, youth, politics, and the state. The chapter is divided into five sections: 1) Studying Popular Music; 2) Studying Rock Music in Mexico; 3) Studying Youth in Mexico; 4) Media, Culture, the Global, and the Local; and 5) Foundations. The first four sections provide an overview of the literature and theoretical underpinnings relevant to the topic at hand. Additionally, each section offers a critique and describes what arguments and positions this dissertation is challenging, engaging, expanding, and/or utilizing. The concluding section weaves the preceding sections together in order to give context to this dissertation and provide the necessary foundation for understanding the subsequent chapters.

#### Studying Popular Music

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Popular music has been studied in many different disciplines. The humanities and social sciences have each approached it differently, while musicologists and ethnomusicologists have offered additional, distinct frameworks for analysis. This section looks at how the social sciences have approached the study of popular music. It first describes what has been referred to as a “critical” tendency in popular music studies, informed largely by German sociologist Theodor Adorno. It then outlines the “celebratory” tendency, which is most closely associated with early cultural studies scholarship. Next, it describes how contemporary popular music scholars have attempted to bridge the gap between critical and celebratory modes, examining the multiple dimensions of popular music

in terms of production, texts, and audiences (and the many vectors associated with these). It concludes with an endorsement of a polyvalent analysis of popular music in everyday life in order to best understand music's social role.

In his book, *Popular Music and Society*, Brian Longhurst describes two principle tendencies in the study of popular music in the social sciences: critical and celebratory (Longhurst 2007: 1). The critical mode is associated with Theodor Adorno who perceived a sharp divide between what he deemed “serious music” and “popular music.” He saw the former as difficult, challenging, provocative, genuine, and capable of instigating social change (Adorno 2004; Morrison 1978). Meanwhile, to Adorno, popular music or music for entertainment represented everything that is dangerous about the culture industries<sup>10</sup> and mass communication, generally. It is standardized, repetitive, remembered in snippets rather than as a complete entity, and “serves to keep listeners from criticizing social realities; in short, it has a soporific effect upon social consciousness” (Adorno 2004: 214). According to Adorno, as a product of the culture industries and a form of entertainment, popular music is yet another invention by these industries to debilitate listeners’ critical thinking faculties, their ability to distinguish quality from artifice, and, ultimately, the cheapening of genuine art and its “prospect of human emancipation” (Durham Peters and Simonson 2004: 210). Sociologist and popular music scholar Simon Frith argues that “Adorno’s is the most systematic and most searing analysis of mass culture and the most challenging for anyone claiming even a scrap of value for the products that come churning out of the music industry” (Frith 1981: 44).

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<sup>10</sup> Schofield Clark explains that Horkheimer and Adorno’s use of “culture industry” in the singular was amended to the plural “culture industries” by Schiller (1989) and Hesmondhalgh (2002) to note the “increased complexity in cultural production” (Schofield Clark 2008: 31).

Adorno and like-minded critics of popular music (and popular culture in general) were influential in the field of mass communication research for decades and it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that popular music scholarship was radically reshaped. Much of this work was a response to Adorno and other mass culture theorists and turned that work on its head, leading to what Longhurst calls the celebratory mode of analysis (Longhurst 2007: 19). Beginning within the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS), scholars turned their attention to audiences and how individuals and groups understood, decoded, and utilized popular music. One of the groundbreaking texts for which the BCCCS is known is *Resistance Through Rituals, Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (Hall and Jefferson 2006), originally published in 1977. The text laid the foundation for decades of work on popular culture and audiences.<sup>11</sup> Central to the authors of *Resistance Through Rituals* was the idea that there are dominant and subordinate cultures that are always in struggle with one another. A principle interest of the text is the ways in which subordinate groups “use the cultural forms provided by late capitalism to resist and critically engage with the oppressive and exploitative social, political, and economic systems” (Gunster 2004: 18).

BCCCS scholars insisted on the importance of class, but not in and of itself. Instead, they were interested in the implications that class position has for the youth involved in subcultures. The cultural studies scholars of *Resistance Through Rituals* turned to subcultures as rich objects of study because, they contended, relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture are always intensely oppositional theaters of struggle in which subcultures bring “a repertoire of strategies and responses – ways of coping as well as of resisting” (Hall and Jefferson 2006: 34). Thus focused on the emancipatory potential of popular culture,

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<sup>11</sup> In time, however, scholarship done in the “cultural studies” vein would move in myriad directions.

scholars utilizing this mode of analysis have tended to celebrate popular music and its audiences.<sup>12</sup>

Longhurst, following the trajectory of the broader field of media studies, proposes a framework for analysis of popular music that examines production, texts, *and* audiences. Setting aside the Adorno-like disdain for commodified products, as well as the cultural studies tendency to imbue such products with resistant potential, Longhurst states: “In general, my view is that even what seem to be the most commodified products of the culture industry need to be examined in their social contexts of production and consumption before any judgments of value can begin to be made” (Longhurst 2007: 265). Longhurst’s position reflects the general trend of popular music studies. Such well-known popular music scholars as Lawrence Grossberg, Simon Frith, Andy Bennett, and Tia DeNora all decry popular music analyses that focus exclusively on a single dimension of the production-text-audience trifecta, even though one dimension may still be privileged over others.<sup>13</sup> Grossberg explains his preferred approach to the study of rock music:

I believe one can put together a sense of the context of the rock formation by describing at least the following aspects: the economic and political terrain; the structural position of youth and generations; the state of play of the various axes that articulate power and identity; the dominant structures of feeling; the media economy (the availability and popularity of various media with different audiences); the state and structure of the music technology and industry; the availability (to youth audiences) of images and discourses of alienation and rebellion; and finally, the emergent structures of feeling (including that of youth in its various articulations) (Grossberg 1997: 18).

Grossberg’s proposed agenda is robust and ambitious, emphasizing the multifaceted and dynamic relationship between popular music and the social world. Equally concerned

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<sup>12</sup> Cultural studies scholar Nick Couldry offers additional critique of the narrowing scope of the “discipline, or interdisciplinary zone,” arguing that it continued “toward more and more detailed reflections on cultural consumption” (Couldry 2011: 10).

<sup>13</sup> Grossberg and Bennett have tended to focus their analyses on fans and fan cultures (Grossberg 1997; Bennett 2001, 2005). Frith looks mostly at production, the music industry, and the social role of popular music (Frith 1981, 1996). DeNora examines music in everyday life and its social force (DeNora 2000).

with the multidimensionality of popular music's relationship with society, sociologist and music scholar Tia DeNora explains: "the theatre of social life is performed on the stage of the quotidian; it is on the platform of the mundane and the sensual that social dramas are rendered" (DeNora 2000: 152). This dissertation draws on the work of these popular music scholars and concurs with their insistence that one must understand the rich contextual tapestry in which music is produced, distributed, consumed, and utilized in order to explain its social role. Thus, analysis is not about the music "itself" or any "essence" that it may have. Instead, following Antoine Hennion, DeNora suggests analysts should:

identify not what the work, as a bounded object, means, or does in itself, but rather, how it comes to be identified by others who refer to or attend to...its various properties so as to construct its symbolic, emotive or corporeal force. Such a strategy ensures that interpretation of music is not used as a resource for, but rather a topic of, investigation (ibid.: 30).

The study of popular music in the social sciences has been deeply influenced by the so-called "critical" work of Adorno and the "celebratory" leanings of early cultural studies. Contemporary scholarship has pushed for a reconciliation of these modes. Scholars like Grossberg, Frith, Bennett, and DeNora, among many others, rightly point out the need for multi-dimensional interpretations of music as part of everyday life. How these themes are taken up by analysts of Mexican rock music is the topic of the following section.

### Studying Rock Music in Mexico

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In the 1993 edited volume, *Simpatía por el rock: Industria, cultura y sociedad (Sympathy for rock: Industry, culture and society)*, the authors note the multiple paths studying rock can generate: from youth collectives and identity formation; to protracted debates about the value of a given song, album, or artist; to studies of interpersonal relations, urban life, memory and biography; or work focused on the industry, production, and consumption

(Aguilar, Sánchez, and Prado 1993: 10). Paraphrasing Mexican anthropologist Maritza Urteaga, if you want to study youth politics in Mexico, you must study youth culture, and if you are studying youth culture – especially urban youth culture – it cannot be dissociated from rock (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998: 7). Thus the trifecta of youth, politics, and rock has been secured. As this section will demonstrate, when it comes to studies of Mexico’s rock music, these three elements are rarely disconnected from one another. How they have been studied, however, has varied widely. This section will begin with a discussion of why contemporary Mexico’s rock music deserves scholarly attention. Next, it will provide an overview of how the genre has been studied. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the shortcomings of these studies and will offer suggestions for improvement that are then taken up in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Adrián de Garay Sánchez’s 1993 book *Rock también es cultura* (*Rock is also culture*) asserts that music has played an essential role in societies throughout the course of history (Garay Sánchez 1993: 9). Garay quotes American composer Elie Siegmeister, writing, “de la cuna a la tumba, literalmente, la música ha sido un factor omnipresente en todas las sociedades” (“from the cradle to the grave, literally, music has been an omnipresent factor in all societies”) (ibid.). But Garay’s interest is not in any or all types of music – his interest lies in rock. Garay explains that in Mexico social scientists and musicologists have dedicated little attention to rock, but he argues the importance of rock is that:

es un intrincado proceso socio-cultural compuesto por una variada gama de elementos que lo hacen ser una de las expresiones músico-culturales con mayor aceptación y penetración masiva en el mundo contemporáneo (ibid.: 10).

it is an intricate socio-cultural process that consists of a wide range of elements that make it one of the musical-cultural expression with the greatest mass acceptance and penetration in the contemporary world.

Garay argues that one of the things that makes rock distinct is that it is not strictly linked to any one territory, locality, or country. It is, in effect, transnational. According to Garay, rock

in Mexico is also “transclasista,” or cross-class.<sup>14</sup> Finally, rock is “transmediática,” present in various media platforms (ibid.). Garay insists these characteristics of Mexican rock make it a particularly rich site of investigation. Additionally, it has received relatively little scholarly attention (especially as compared to *bolero* or *ranchera*,<sup>15</sup> for example), in spite of the fact that it has been the subject of many journalistic and other non-academic accounts (see: Roura 1985; Paredes Pacho 1992; Monsiváis 1992; Durán and Barrios 1995; Aceves 1999; Agustín 2004).

Indeed, the earliest accounts of the period of contemporary Mexican rock examined in this dissertation (1980-present) are journalistic or insider in nature. In 1985, journalist Víctor Roura compiled his writings on rock in the postcard-sized book, *Apuntes de Rock: Por las calles del mundo* (*Notes on Rock: Via the streets of the world*). Roura notes that Mexico’s *roqueros* are treated with little respect, but laments that thanks to commercialization rock is losing its rebelliousness. Though too early to pronounce a death-sentence for Mexico’s nascent rock scene (one which was only *just* emerging at the moment the book was published), Roura is decidedly against commercialization for rock and argues that any relationship with the media will end up stripping rock of its revolutionary potential (Roura 1985: 20). Roura is committed to rock as “contestaria” (“contestatory”<sup>16</sup>), “authentic” (i.e., not commercial), and decidedly outside the mainstream; he wishes for nothing more than that it maintain such a role. This commitment colors Roura’s journalistic objectivity and reveals that his interest in the genre is primarily as a fan, specifically a fan interested in social revolution.

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<sup>14</sup> Other authors have argued that 1980s-era rock was distinct because it came from the poorest sectors of society (e.g., Roura 1985). This dissertation will demonstrate, however, that rock quickly transcended class boundaries becoming popular across socio-economic divisions. Roura (1985), as well as many others, acknowledge this (a few examples include Aguilar et al. 1993; Paredes Pacho 1992; Woodside Woods 2010).

<sup>15</sup> These are two genres of popular Mexican music that were important in the creation of Mexico’s national identity from the 1920s through the 1950s. They will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>16</sup> Oddly, in English the verb “to contest” does not have an adjective form that is equivalent to “contestario” in Spanish. Here I will use the invented “contestatory” which conveys the appropriate sense of the Spanish word.

In 1992, musician José Luis Paredes Pacho, member of 1980s band Maldita Vecindad, published his insider's take on Mexico's rock music and its social role. Both Paredes Pacho and Carlos Monsiváis (famous Mexican social commentator and public intellectual), who wrote the introduction to the book, *Rock Mexicano: Sonidos de la Calle* (*Mexican Rock: Sounds of the street*), explain that Mexico's rock music is incredibly diverse and heterogeneous, with its followers having varied origins and purposes (Paredes Pacho 1992). Nevertheless, the authors perceive great social import in the music and begin laying out what that may be. The account is constrained both by the relative novelty of the genre and Paredes Pacho's intimate position as a star of the burgeoning scene.

The first academic accounts of Mexico's contemporary rock music came from Garay and Aguilar et al. in 1993. As noted above, Garay was one of the first scholars to assert that rock music was worthy of study. His approach saw rock as "un escaparate," or window, through which to understand production, circulation, and consumption of cultural practices. Garay looked specifically at the structure and dynamics of rock's production (Garay Sánchez 1993: 11-12). The edited volume compiled by Aguilar and his co-editors emerged from a roundtable discussion also called "Simpatía por el rock" ("Sympathy for rock") and contributors examined: 1) the production and transmission of rock as a cultural good; 2) rock as a collective sensibility; and 3) rock as a musical and aesthetic phenomenon (Aguilar et al. 1993).<sup>17</sup> The edited volume reveals the lack of consensus among scholars of Mexican rock at the time. For example, professor José Saavedra offers bold critique of fellow contributor Maritza Urteaga in the early pages of his chapter! One major shortcoming of the

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<sup>17</sup> The arguments of the sixteen, concise chapters cover incredibly diverse terrain and will not be summarized here. However, the contribution of professor José Saavedra will be discussed below as it provides a blueprint for how to study popular music and a critique of how the subject has been addressed previously in Mexico (Saavedra Casco 1993).

collection, however, is that it does not include analyses that examine rock as a cultural good, a collective sensibility, *and* an aesthetic phenomenon.

Subsequent scholarship on Mexican rock music has become increasingly narrow: Urteaga's 1998 book focused on the punk subculture in and around Mexico City; Cortés chronicled psychedelic rock in his 1999 book; Analco and Zetina examined the ska subculture in their 2000 book; in 2001 Rodríguez explored rock music in the Yucatán peninsula; in 2005 García Leyva described the rock scene in the state of Guerrero; while Nateras Dominguez discussed neo-tribalism and urban music-based subcultures in Mexico City in his 2005 article. A few accounts have explored rock as both a national phenomenon and as a broad, inclusive, popular music genre. Musicologist Violeta Torres Medina's 2002 book, *Rock-Eros en concreto: genesis e historia del rockmex* (*Rock-Eros in concrete: genesis and history of rockmex*), is an "urban, ethnomusicological" account of eroticism in rock music (Torres Medina 2002). Finally, in his recent work, Julián Woodside Woods fuses history with musicology and proposes an approach to studying music that uses music as an historical source, i.e., an historical document to discuss how music and soundscape are part of the identity and memory of a community (Woodside Woods 2010).

Of the texts on Mexican rock music written in English, historian Eric Zolov's *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, is the most well-known and comprehensive (Zolov 1999). Published in 1999, it is primarily concerned with Mexico's rock 'n' roll from the 1950s to the 1970s. With regard to contemporary Mexican rock, Zolov draws a tight link between opposition politics (i.e., anti-PRI politics) and rock music when he writes, "Today, the identification between rock music and democratic politics goes almost without question in opposition circles" (ibid.: 257). He goes on to assert, "Mexican rock has once again become the vanguard of a new countercultural movement, one that transcends class in its opposition

to the ruling political party and a mounting culture of repression” (ibid.: 258). In a similar vein, Mexican sociologist Héctor Castillo Berthier’s 2004 article, “My Generation: Rock and *la Banda*’s Forced Survival Opposite the Mexican State,”<sup>18</sup> explains, “Since its beginnings, Mexican rock has connoted rebellion, nonconformity, generational struggles, and the search for new forms of expression. As a cultural practice, Mexican rock has generated a diversity of symbolic identities for urban youth of all social classes” (Castillo Berthier 2004: 259). Like Garay, Castillo Berthier sees Mexican rock as cross-class and transnational. Unlike Garay, however, he perceives rock as inherently rebellious, non-conformist, anti-establishment, and contestatory. Both Zolov’s and Castillo Berthier’s accounts characterize contemporary rock music *before* examining it in its social, economic, and political contexts and without reference to the different roles rock has played in Mexico since the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

Two other accounts of Mexico’s rock have described its relationship with the United States. These have focused on its manifestations along the two countries’ shared geographic border, or in terms of rock’s proclivity for border crossing (respectively, Corona and Madrid 2008; Kun 2005). In his book, *Audiotopia: music, race, and America*, American studies scholar, Josh Kun, writes:

*Rock en español*<sup>20</sup> hears America singing—both the geopolitically policed place and the ideologically policed idea—but it hears a contested and contradictory field of hybrid soundings that exceed its own borders. Far from hearing nations as fixed, bounded orchestras striving for symphonic harmony and racial unisonance, *rock en español*’s audiotopias imagine and perform disparate national formations as dynamic musical geographies and densely populated sonic landscapes traversed, crossed, cut up, and reorganized by an ever-expanding array of sounds and noises (Kun 2005: 185).

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<sup>18</sup> The concept of “la banda” will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>19</sup> In Zolov’s defense, he wrote his book at a time when Mexico’s rock music’s character was fairly overt and clear. As this dissertation will demonstrate, this role has not been fixed or consistent over time.

<sup>20</sup> *Rock en español* is an umbrella term for popular Mexican rock of the 1990s during the genre’s “boom.” This period is discussed in detail in chapter five.

Kun uses Mexico's *rock en español* to analyze "American identity and national space," which makes his contribution to the study of Mexican rock music *within* Mexico tangential. Latin American Studies scholars Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid's edited volume, *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, asks "how music reflects and reflects upon new understandings of citizenship beyond the nation-state; how it works as a site of resistance against globalization or nationalist forms of oppression" (Corona and Madrid 2008: ix). The essays in this volume that examine Mexican rock music focus on the peculiar ways it has manifested along Mexico's northern border, and while the musical trends these essays reveal are real and significant, they represent a niche and are not relevant nation-wide. Additionally, as will be argued later in this chapter and elsewhere, this dissertation sees a "postnational" conceptualization of Mexico's rock music as a premature theoretical construct that inappropriately divests local, lived experiences of their centrality and importance.

In sum, the literature on Mexico's rock music notes that the music's widespread appeal and resonance, its transnational, trans-class, and trans-mediated nature, and the fact that it has received relatively little scholarly attention make it a rich site of investigation. Studies of rock have generally perceived rock as rebellious, contestatory, anti-establishment, and opposed to the state. While much scholarship has highlighted the diversity and heterogeneity of Mexico's rock music landscape, little attention has been paid to rock as a "formation" (in Grossberg's terms) or a social phenomenon, intimately linked with political, economic, social, and historical forces that shape its use and meaning. Kun and Corona and Madrid offer readings that emphasize the dynamism of the "nation" reflected in rock music, but they are consistent with the other scholars reviewed above in their insistence on rock as "contesting" borders and as a "site of resistance" (Kun 2004; Corona and Madrid 2008).

Interestingly, many of these shortcomings were noted as early as 1993 when Saavedra pointed out three principle errors in studies of Mexican rock music. As this section has demonstrated, they continued to present themselves in scholarship for many years to come. First, he writes:

Por lo general cuando hablamos de rock, construimos una imagen ideal de éste; lo consideramos contestatario, popular, agresivo, audaz, revolucionario y vanguardista. La producción que no tiene tales atributos, es descartada automáticamente de nuestro análisis (Saavedra Casco 1993: 50).

In general, when we speak of rock, we construct an ideal image of it; we consider it contestatory, lumpen, aggressive, bold, revolutionary and vanguard. The production that does not have these attributes is automatically discarded from our analysis.

This observation mirrors a central theme of this dissertation and will be elaborated upon at length at several points below. Saavedra's second point is related. He argues that there is a tendency to universalize rock:

Si bien como género musical el rock ha invadido exitosamente todos los rincones del orbe, sin respetar credos, razas o jerarquías, no sucede lo mismo cuando funciona dentro del rol de expresión cultural (ibid.: 51).

While rock as a musical genre has successfully invaded every corner of the planet, without respect for creed, race or hierarchies, the same does not occur when rock functions within the role of cultural expression.

Once again, Saavedra's point and this dissertation are on parallel tracks. As will be explained below, Mexico's rock music must be studied in its local context and in relation to global forces; what it means and the social role it plays cannot be determined prior to observation and analysis.

Saavedra's final critique is that rock is often treated anachronistically, without being placed within the very particular realities of the moment in which it emerges (ibid.: 52). Therefore, rock must be analyzed contextually, relationally, and historically if it is to be understood and explained adequately. In the end, Saavedra offers five concrete precepts for

the academic study of rock music (not unlike those enumerated by Grossberg, in the previous section), which this dissertation takes seriously and endeavors to employ:

1. Debe ubicar al rock dentro de un contexto histórico, tomando en cuenta el momento que se vive cuando cubra fuerza un grupo o movimiento determinado.
  2. Es necesario investigar la trayectoria del rock como industria dentro del país ... así como las características de los medios de comunicación....
  3. Analizar las características culturales de los sectores sociales que consumen rock.... Aquí es indispensable salir de la universidad y contactar a la gente.
  4. Tomar en cuenta la situación política y económica del país....
  5. Cuando se pretenda hacer estudio global sobre rock, ya sea a nivel mundial o local, nunca hay que perder la perspectiva de la diversidad y coexistencia de géneros, estilos y mensajes de los grupos de rock y de sus públicos. (ibid.: 56).
1. Rock should be situated within its historical context, keeping in mind the lived moment when a given group or movement gathers strength.
  2. It is necessary to investigate rock's trajectory as an industry inside a country ... that is, the characteristics of the mass media...
  3. Analyze the cultural characteristics of the social sectors that consume rock.... Here it is indispensable to leave the university and to contact people.
  4. Keep in mind the political and economic situation of the country....
  5. When one purports to do a global study of rock, be it on a worldwide level or a local level, one should never lose sight of the diversity and the co-existence of different genres, styles, and messages of rock groups and their fans.

With these suggestions in mind, and with the general shape and shortcomings of the field of study of Mexico's rock music now established, this chapter turns to how youth – the principle actors within the world of rock – have been studied in Mexico.

### Studying Youth in Mexico

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In the volume *Situación de los jóvenes en México* (*Situation of youth in Mexico*), editor Rossana Reguillo describes how youth as a social category and topic of discussion emerged in Mexico not as an object of academic inquiry, but rather from the public sphere (Reguillo Cruz 2010a: 9). That is, youth first became a subject of interest in the wake of Mexico's

student protests in 1968.<sup>21</sup> Reguillo explains that this was the first moment in “juvenología mexicana” (“Mexican youthology,” or youth studies) and it was followed, in the 1980s, by the emergence of the “joven popular urbano” (“young, urban, lumpen class”) and an academic focus on “bandas juveniles” (youth gangs or groups). The following phase of Mexican youth studies cemented itself in the 1990s and examined “culturas juveniles.” This shift explored the influence of media, globalization, and the complex, heterogeneous nature of young people’s social world (ibid.:10). Reguillo notes that each of these phases in the field of Mexican youth studies had strong links with “movimientos musicales” (“music movements”), once again underscoring the relationship between youth and music (ibid.). Having noted these important phases in the study of Mexico’s youth, the rest of this section describes the theoretical influences that have shaped Mexico’s “juvenología.”

Reguillo traces two major tendencies in the theoretical foundation of youth studies in Mexico. She calls one the “de-dramatized approach” (“postura desdramatizada”) and the other the “instrumental approach” (“postura instrumental”) (Reguillo Cruz 2009). She argues that these are in tension with one another and are representative of the discourse on the social inclusion of youth. The de-dramatized or diffused approach to youth, explains Reguillo, focuses on the performativity of youth. In particular, it is concerned with codes, emblems, values, and representations that create cohesion among a group of young people. It is concerned with the roles of institutions and the market in belonging and citizenship (drawing on well-known anthropologist Néstor García Canclini), as well as how politics and conflict are shut down or capped in these relations (drawing on political theorist Chantal Mouffe). Reguillo critiques this approach for stripping actors of agency and situating youth not in a position of acceptance and/or negotiation with systems, but in an even more

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<sup>21</sup> These protests will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

vulnerable position, that is, outside of them entirely. Reguillo argues that rather than being outside of these systems, young people are active participants, though, she argues, what that participation looks like can vary. For example, in her recent ethnographic work with the anarchist-punk subculture, she has observed that silence does not mean young people have *lost* their voices, but rather that it is silence by choice. Thus, silence is a signifier rather than a sign (ibid.: 44).

For Reguillo, Zygmunt Bauman exemplifies the instrumental approach. According to Reguillo, Bauman contends that inadequacy of self, i.e., some sort of personal sense of lack, effectively deactivates any anti-institutional passion, critique, or action, replacing these with a sense of being guilty of something elusive. Reguillo says this is what Ulrich Beck refers to as the biographical solution to systemic contradictions. But saddling young people with the responsibility for their situation is problematic for Reguillo and smacks of essentialism, she argues. Essentialist views of youth deem it homogenous, unambiguous, biological (that is, related to one's age), and somehow outside of the social. For Reguillo, youth is a socially constructed category and thus full of the complexity that contextual factors like culture, economics, politics, and society contribute.

She critiques the approaches described above for either valorizing the productive capacity of young bodies as the key to inclusion and participation (the traditional view) or maximizing joy and pleasure as the key to redefining the youthful body (the postmodern view) (ibid.: 46). She disparagingly writes: “Nada nuevo bajo el sol, trabajo y placer como categorías escindidas en la definición unívoca, a su interpretación correcta” (“Nothing new under the sun, work and pleasure as split categories in the univocal definition, for a correct interpretation”) (ibid.). In the end, Reguillo advocates viewing youth as a socially constructed

category – situated historically and relationally – and young people as one of society’s many actors.

In two recent articles that complement Reguillo’s work, Mexican anthropologist and youth scholar Maritza Urteaga traces the theoretical literature that has influenced studies of youth in Mexico. She acknowledges the contributions of very early biological and psychological approaches (she cites Rousseau’s *Émile* as an example), structuralist-functional work (here she cites Bernardi and Spencer), notions of youth as a liminal space (citing Victor Turner), as well as work that focused on working class youth gangs (pointing to both the Chicago School theorists and to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) (Urteaga Castro Pozo 2009). Urteaga notes that much of this literature came to Mexico relatively recently (Urteaga Castro Pozo 2010: 24), therefore, while it has been influential, the debates of each approaches’ relative merits have necessarily played themselves out differently than they have in the United States or Europe, effectively bypassing some theoretical pendulum swings and leading to a certain level of theoretical pluralism.<sup>22</sup> In the end, Urteaga argues in a similar vein as Reguillo that “youth” is a discursive formation “al interior de la cual diferentes tipos de jóvenes, y el concepto mismo de ‘juventud’, son construidos en cada cultura en diferentes momentos históricos” (“inside of which different types of young people, and the concept of ‘youth’ itself, are constructed in each culture in different historical moments”) (Urteaga Castro Pozo 2010: 18).

These well-known scholars of Mexican youth and their colleagues (including other prominent figures such as José Manuel Valenzuela, José Antonio Pérez Islas, Rogelio

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<sup>22</sup> As will be made clear below, this is also true of media and cultural studies in Latin America. Because many theorists and theories arrived late to Latin America, “critical media studies didn’t have to push against the tradition of positivist, administrative, ‘media effects’ research that dominated communication studies in the United States” (Szurmuk and Waisbord 2011: 32).

Marcial, Alfredo Nateras Domínguez, and, most famously, Néstor García Canclini) share the following proposal:

[D]ar estatuto y respetabilidad epistemológica a la juventud y a admitir que los jóvenes son creadores y poseedores de culturas de la juventud, y otorga prioridad a las prácticas y formas expresivas y simbólicas a través de las cuales la sociedad es experimentada por la gente joven... (ibid.: 19).

[T]o give epistemological status and responsibility to youth and to admit that young people are creators and possessors of youth cultures, and grant priority to practices and symbolic forms of expression through which young people experience society....

This dissertation is indebted to contemporary scholars of Mexican youth and draws appreciatively from their extensive research. In particular, this dissertation shares the desire to “inscribir la importancia crucial para el México contemporáneo de pensar – y entender – a sus jóvenes” (“inscribe the crucial importance for contemporary Mexico to think about – and to understand – its young people”) (Reguillo Cruz 2010a: 13). Consistent with contemporary scholarship on Mexican youth, this dissertation is concerned with the dialogic processes involving the political, economic, and social spheres that shape young people’s activities. However, this dissertation approaches the study of youth and rock music from a global media studies perspective and draws from that literature more directly than the various theoretical strands that have influenced Mexican youth studies. Therefore, how the media are studied in Mexico is the topic of the following section.

### Media, Culture, the Global, and the Local

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In a recent article, “The Intellectual Impasse of Cultural Studies of the Media in Latin America: How to Move Forward,” authors Mónica Szurmuk and Silvio Waisbord offer a useful overview of how the media have been studied in Latin America and the relationship these studies have had with British-born cultural studies (Szurmuk and Waisbord 2011). As the title of their paper indicates, the authors also make recommendations for how to move

cultural studies of the media, within a Latin American context, forward. This section recounts the history of media studies and cultural studies in Latin America – initially two distinct fields. It then reviews Szurmuk and Waisbord’s recommendations. Next, how these recommendations parallel suggestions made by Marwan Kraidy and Patrick Murphy with regard to global media studies will be discussed. Central to Kraidy and Murphy’s argument is that global media studies scholarship would be greatly enhanced by bringing the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz more centrally into its fold – advice that this dissertation takes seriously and makes central to its theoretical foundation.

Szurmuk and Waisbord point out that media studies and cultural studies “are both relatively new intellectual endeavors that grew out of a more general critique of capitalism and state terrorism” in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s (Szurmuk and Waisbord 2011: 9). The relationship between the media, culture, capitalism, and authoritarian states has deeply shaped the work produced in both fields. For example, Szurmuk and Waisbord argue scholarship has been notably political rather than being theoretically driven and media systems have been perceived as agents of the state and capitalist socio-economic relations (ibid.:11-12). As the authors put it, this has made the “intellectual enterprise” of both media and cultural studies “inseparable from the critique of capitalism and power relations in the region” (ibid.). Given this premise, it is not surprising that this work would be founded on Marxist concepts and theoretical precepts. Szurmuk and Waisbord explain that both media and cultural studies in Latin America have been directly influenced by the Frankfurt School, the BCCCS, French post-structuralism, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser, indeed, many of the same theorists that have influenced media and cultural studies in the United Kingdom and in the United States.

In the Latin American context, the fields of media and cultural studies were separate until the 1980s when the seminal work of communication scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero and anthropologist Néstor García Canclini began to bring the fields together. Prior to that time, media and communication scholarship had focused on media industries and media content, while cultural studies was closely linked with literary studies. The work of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini helped bridge a gap, moving scholarship away from “high culture” and focusing instead on “popular” and “mass” culture (ibid.: 15). Additionally, their work was momentous because of the following contributions: it de-centered media institutions as creators of meaning, instead turning research toward uses of popular media observed via ethnography; it pointed out the problems with dichotomous conceptualizations of culture, and alerted scholars to the importance of hybridity; it re-oriented research away from media domination and presumed repression of critical consciousness and toward the phenomenology of identity-making practices; and it engaged in philosophical and cultural interpretations of modernity, underscoring the problems with modernization theory (ibid.: 17-24). Thus, Martín-Barbero’s 1987 book, *De los medios a las mediaciones (Communication, Culture, and Hegemony: From the media to mediations)* and his 2001 book, *Al sur de la modernidad: comunicación, globalización y multiculturalidad (From the south of modernity: communication, globalization and multiculturalism)* along with García Canclini’s 1989 book, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad (Hybrid Cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity)* and his 1995 book *Consumidores y ciudadanos (Consumers and Citizens: globalization and multicultural conflict)* have become cornerstones for scholarship on media and consumer culture in Latin America. Because both scholars have lived and worked extensively in Mexico, their work is especially relevant there.

Although the fields of media and cultural studies have evolved in Latin America, Szurmuk and Waisbord point out that they have reached an intellectual impasse resulting in “restrained intellectual development,” a lack of theory-building, and general stagnation (Szurmuk and Waisbord 2011: 7). “Too often, the arguments that have delineated a new course of communication/media studies decades ago have been taken as conclusions to be demonstrated once more, rather than as starting theoretical points to be probed” (ibid.: 30). This has led, they explain, “to the loss of innovation and refreshing perspectives that should characterize critical media studies” (ibid.). Szurmuk and Waisbord argue:

It is not sufficient to continue to demonstrate the active and mestizo character of culture, find more examples of cross-border cultures, or hammer more nails on the coffin of essentialism. When hybridity, as well as adjacent concepts like bricolage, *mélange* and *mestizaje* (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009) are widely accepted as the dominant characteristics of globalized culture, the theoretical tasks are different (ibid.: 32).

Instead of falling into the trap of concluding that cultural phenomena are “hybrid” and the result of borders crossed, these authors offer the following call to action for scholars of media and culture in Latin America, a call this dissertation heeds:

[Studies] should primarily be aimed at refining theoretical arguments and concepts by asking how developments in the region shed light on long-standing questions about power, globalization, conflict, participation and collective identities that are at the centre of media and cultural studies (ibid.: 34).

Interestingly, global media studies scholars Marwan Kraidy and Patrick Murphy offer specific ways of responding to Szurmuk and Waisbord’s call.

#### *“Shifting Geertz” and Refusing to Disengage the Global from the Local*

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Kraidy and Murphy trace the development of global media and communication research from its start in international development programming in the 1950s, to its most prevalent contemporary manifestation which emphasizes cultural globalization and hybridity

(Kraidy and Murphy 2008). The authors argue that while cultural globalization and hybridity theories effectively examine active audiences and “the productive nature of cultural consumption” – thus moving scholarship away from the political economy pole – work done in this vein is often celebratory and inadequately accounts for material factors (echoing critiques of celebratory popular music studies discussed above) (ibid.: 341). Unfortunately, the global media studies work that has attempted to bring the active audience and political economy poles together has, these authors argue, lacked empirical grounding. Utilizing Clifford Geertz’s notion of the local, Kraidy and Murphy believe, provides the missing element needed in global communication scholarship: “Field-driven analysis that engages the particularities of the local in its broader structural and comparative context” (ibid.).

Kraidy and Murphy explain that a Geertzian approach to the local provides the means to focus on the local without disengaging it from global forces. Rather than pitting the local and the global opposite one another, Kraidy and Murphy explain that Geertz’s commitment “to the details of the ordinary and the local as an analytical means to reach larger conclusions about the social world emerges as a running theme...in Geertz’s work. His approach provides a blueprint for the examination of symbolic actions and their connection to issues of local meaning without losing track of broader contexts of social life” (ibid.: 339). Thus, the local is not separate from global historical, economic, political, or social forces, “[r]ather, the local needs to be understood as the space where global forces become recognizable in form and practice as they are enmeshed in local human subjectivity and social agency” (ibid.).

Kraidy and Murphy are not ignorant of the critiques of Geertz by anthropologists, historians, and social theorists concerned with power. However, following anthropologist Sherry Ortner, they argue that there are “openings that Geertz’s work left ajar” through

which to probe more deeply questions of power (and, this dissertation contends, the implications of historical context) (ibid.: 341). One central opening is Geertz's conceptualizations of culture and social structure, which leave them analytically distinct, but intimately connected. As Geertz explains, "culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions of the same phenomena" (quoted in ibid.: 342). Kraidy and Murphy rightly see in this explanation the means through which to examine the local while understanding it as bound up with the global. Additionally, Geertz's explanation provides a conceptual model for studying *cultural* phenomena in order to explain the *social* world.

Kraidy and Murphy's analysis and use of Geertz are illuminating but because a Geertzian approach is central to this dissertation attention will now be focused directly on his work.

*Ethnography, Aesthetic Forms, and Examining Culture to Say Something of Something*<sup>23</sup>

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Anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously interpreted rituals and practices of everyday life in an effort "to draw broad generalizations out of special instances, to penetrate deeply enough into detail to discover something more than detail" (Geertz 1973: 313). For Geertz, the details of everyday life communicate meanings and are capable of saying something about the social world and its inhabitants. Following Weber, Geertz sees "man as an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (ibid.: 5). He takes "culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science

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<sup>23</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Geertz's essay, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," in which one section is headed "Saying Something of Something" (Geertz 1973: 448).

in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (ibid.). Geertz contends that culture is more than the sum of its parts and to conduct research in a culture other than one’s own requires that the researcher familiarize herself with the “imaginative universe within which [subjects’] acts are signs” (ibid.: 13).

Equipped with this interpretive toolbox, a researcher can begin to “uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts” and in so doing “construct a system of analysis” that identifies what is generic to those structures and what makes them different and determinate of human behavior (ibid.: 27). According to Geertz, this is the task of cultural analysis. Geertz looks at the details of life not because of any intrinsic value they may have but because of the role they play “in an ongoing pattern of life” (ibid.: 17). In looking at the details of life (Geertz’s famous example is of the Balinese cockfight), however, the researcher must be careful not to extrapolate their significance too broadly: “The cockfight is not the master key to Balinese life, any more than bullfighting is to Spanish. What it says about that life is not unqualified nor even unchallenged by what other equally eloquent cultural statements say about it” (ibid.: 452). In other words, though the “interpretive science” Geertz advocates can reveal a great deal, Geertz insists it is “intrinsically incomplete” (ibid.: 29). Looking at one cultural text provides a window on the world in which actors take up particular themes, order “them into an encompassing structure,” and provide a “simulation of the social matrix...in which...devotees live” (ibid.: 443, 436). Therefore, like the Balinese cockfight, Mexican rock music is one of a number of competing perceptions of Mexican social life, but nonetheless tells us much about that social life. For example, Geertz writes that the cockfight “is not an imitation of the punctuateness of Balinese social life, nor a depiction of it, nor even an expression of it; it is *an example* of it, carefully prepared” (ibid.: 446, emphasis added).

For Geertz cultural phenomena are aesthetic forms with aesthetic power. He writes of the cockfight: “A cultural figure against a social ground, the fight is at once a convulsive surge of animal hatred, a mock war of symbolic selves, and a formal simulation of status tensions, and its aesthetic power derives from its capacity to force together these diverse realities” (ibid.: 444). Therefore, cultural phenomena play themselves out within social contexts (with, as noted above, local and global forces woven through) and their symbolic power comes from their ability to pull together real-life themes and present them in ways that make sense and are relevant to the actors themselves. Geertz writes, “An image, fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them (though, in its playing-with-fire way it does a bit of both), but in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds, and money, *to display them*” (ibid.: 444, emphasis added).

How Geertz goes about uncovering the meaning of cultural phenomena, these “displays” and “examples” of social life, is via ethnography (and is, therefore, consistent with the leading Mexican youth studies scholars discussed above). Geertz describes four characteristics of ethnographic writing: 1) it is interpretive; 2) what it interprets is the flow of social discourse; 3) it attempts to rescue the “said” of this discourse and fix it by inscribing it, that is, by writing it down; 4) finally, in practice it is microscopic (ibid.: 20-21). By “microscopic” Geertz means that ethnography is necessarily hyper-local, describing through “thick description” the details of everyday life in a very particular location and context. For Geertz, “thick description” is achieved through the use of certain techniques that aid in creating rich texture in a researcher’s written account (i.e., rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, keeping a diary, etc.) (ibid.: 6). All of these are important elements of doing cultural analysis because, after all:

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior<sup>24</sup> (ibid.: 10).

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This section first described the trajectory of media and cultural studies in Latin America as having been shaped by the Frankfurt School, early cultural studies, French post-structuralism, Gramsci, and Althusser. The work of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini shifted scholarship done in the realms of media and culture, emphasizing “popular” and “mass” culture as utilized in everyday life, the importance of ethnography, and the centrality of hybridity in the *mestizo* landscape of Latin America. Szurmuk and Waisbord, however, pointed out that contemporary media and cultural studies in Latin America have become stagnant and theoretically rote, providing more examples of hybridity and crossed borders without becoming more theoretically sophisticated or innovative. These authors entreat scholars to interrogate how globalization, participation, and collective identities can lead the way to better, more refined theoretical arguments.

Kraidy and Murphy ask similar questions from the perspective of global media studies and conclude that a Geertzian approach – with its ethnographic richness and commitment to the details of the ordinary – can help reveal how local cultural phenomena are entangled with global political, economic, social, and historical forces. Adding to Kraidy and Murphy’s characterizations of the usefulness of Geertz’s “interpretive science,” this dissertation takes up Geertz’s notion of culture as “webs of significance” that social actors weave in order to make sense of their lives and social world. Using Geertz-inspired cultural analysis it is possible to read deeply into cultural phenomena that then serve as windows on

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<sup>24</sup> I take “transient examples of shaped behavior” to be the very objects of study Geertz selects and encourages – the Balinese cockfight, for example.

the world in which actors have taken up certain themes and “carefully prepared” them as examples of their perceptions of their lived experiences. As Geertz explains in reference to the cockfight, what this work reveals is a particular reading that says much about the larger social context in which cultural phenomena are embedded: “Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1973: 448).

## Foundations

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A number of themes have emerged from this literature review and discussion of theory. First, this dissertation takes seriously recommendations from contemporary popular music scholars, certain Mexican rock music investigators, as well as scholars of Mexican youth that placing music within the rich contextual tapestry where it is produced, distributed, consumed, and utilized is essential to understanding its social role. This must, necessarily, include economic, political, social, historical, and cultural factors. This leads to a second, related theme: scholarship focused on popular music must be multi-dimensional, examining production, texts, and audiences relationally. Though it is likely that one or two of these dimensions will be privileged over another, they all need to be part of any rigorous investigation.

Literature discussed in this chapter shows that analyses of Mexican rock music often *begin* with detailed understandings and explanations of what rock music is and does. Like the early cultural studies scholars discussed in the first section of this chapter, investigations of Mexican rock music assume rock is a theater in which dominant and subordinate cultural forces struggle. In order to get to the heart of one of the central questions of this project, that is, the relationship between Mexican rock, youth, politics, and the state, a third theme

that this literature review has revealed, is that these assumptions must be put aside in order to avoid, as Saavedra puts it, discarding from our analysis music that might not fit inside these parameters. Following Szurmuk, Waisbord, Kraidy, Murphy, and Geertz, a fourth theme emerges: contrary to much early global media studies work, the global and the local must be studied in tandem and we can most effectively assess global forces by focusing on local cultural phenomena. This dissertation is not representative of the hyper-local studies advocated by Geertz, and, admittedly, clear lines are not always drawn between analyses of Mexico City (where most of the fieldwork took place) and Mexico, the country, precisely *because* Mexico City as a locality is used to say something about Mexico as a nation – a nation with connections, linkages, and interactions with global forces (be they economic, political, social, or cultural).

Finally, a Geertzian frame is utilized to permit all of the above-mentioned themes to play themselves out fully. This frame is especially important because it encourages a focus on cultural phenomena on the backdrop of the social; as Geertz puts it, “a cultural figure against a social ground” (Geertz 1973: 444). A Geertzian approach also recognizes the power of aesthetic forms, acknowledging that symbolic power comes from their ability to present real-life themes in a way that makes sense to and resonates with actors themselves. And, lastly, Geertz’s work serves as a reminder that cultural phenomena are windows, they are incomplete and only partial, therefore, Mexican rock music and whatever findings this dissertation assembles are not universal or generally experienced, but neither are they simply isolated, microscopic occurrences with no meaning beyond the immediate.

With this literature and conceptual framework established, this dissertation now turns to the historical context in which Mexican rock music re-emerged.

## Chapter III

### The Post-Revolutionary State:

#### Shaping National Identity via Popular Music

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In September 1971, the Festival Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro (The Rock and Wheels Festival at Avándaro) took place. Over 200,000 people attended the two day Mexican version of Woodstock. By and large, local officials and businesses supported the festival as a means of bringing tourist money to the area. Though plagued with the problems typical of festivals of its size (sanitation and mud, for example), the event was peaceful and explicitly apolitical. Festival organizers were interested in getting a feel for Mexico's nascent native rock music, its popularity, its quality, and its potential. Dozens of bands performed and while some foreign rock groups were invited, the event highlighted Mexico's native rock music. As one participant proclaimed, "We don't need *gabacho* [US] or European groups. Now we have our own music" (quoted in Zolov 1999: 210). All did not go well at Avándaro, however. Inadequate infrastructure and poor planning conspired to strand thousands of participants at the venue, necessitating assistance from the federal government. President Echeverría sent 300 school buses to Avándaro to help festival goers get out. On hand throughout the festival, and with specific orders not to provoke participants, was the Mexican military which refused to arrest concert-goers for drugs and maintained a peaceful stance (Zolov 1999, 2004; Rubenstein 2000).

The peaceful spirit of both the military and the participants at Avándaro seemed like a turning point in the relationship between government and youth after the massacre of student protesters in Tlatelolco in October 1968, subsequent police and military repression,

and another massacre of students protesters in July 1971<sup>25</sup>. The Mexican government's discomfort with youth and its fear of a revolutionary awakening outweighed any goodwill exercised at Avándaro, however. In the weeks and months following the festival, President Echeverría "turned [Mexico's] administrative and repressive forces against the native rock movement at the levels of production, distribution and consumption" (Zolov 1999: 217).

President Echeverría's concern with rock music should be seen as yet another chapter in a decades-long effort to shape and control images and sounds of the Mexican nation. Following Mexico's fractious and violent Revolution (1910-1920), post-Revolutionary governments worked relentlessly to construct a sense of national unity and identity (Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov 2001). Their efforts coincided with the birth and rapid growth of mass media industries, such as radio, film, print, and, later, television. Latin American communication scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero remarks that Mexico has the strongest sense of national identity of any Latin American country precisely because of the post-Revolutionary governments' control of the culture industries (Martín-Barbero 1993: 156).

This chapter explores the relationship between the Mexican state, the mass media, and popular music from the 1930s through the 1970s. The state's relationship with two popular music genres that dominated the period – *ranchera* and *bolero* – will be discussed first with particular attention paid to the role of the mass media in the state's efforts to define and construct Mexico's national identity. Next, the state's relationship with rock music – the popular music genre that dominated the next thirty year period – will be contrasted with *ranchera* and *bolero* and will lead to a discussion of what made rock music different and why it elicited such a violent and (temporarily) debilitating response from the government.

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<sup>25</sup> These tragic events will be discussed in more detail below.

Referring to the Mexican Revolution, Mexican social critic Carlos Monsiváis writes, “And a body is dragged and trampled on, and another one falls and is blown apart and, among the cries of agony and the shots and the puff of dust caused by the falling body, the country is made” (Monsiváis 1997: 8). Metaphorically speaking, the dragging, trampling, and cries of agony did not cease with the end of the Revolution. Indeed, through the processes of making the country, while some rose up, others were trampled and cried out in agony. The post-Revolutionary governments’ (all from the PRI – a single, oligarchic political party at the locus of power until 2000) relationship with popular culture is illustrative of these processes. As will be shown, however, the Mexican government did not act unilaterally. Constant tension, negotiation, and contention – not consensus – marked the decades following the Revolution. And while the government exercised tremendous power and control, its efforts were regularly shaped, reinforced, or countered by the powerful forces of the mass media (and their wealthy owners), as well as musicians, intellectuals, and listeners.<sup>26</sup> These processes will be discussed below. However, this section begins with a brief description of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath so as to contextualize the post-Revolutionary period.

The Mexican Revolution began as an effort to end Porfirio Díaz’s authoritarian rule, which had lasted more than thirty years (1876-1911).<sup>27</sup> Under the rubric of “Order and Progress,” Díaz’s regime was a period of massive modernization, improved and beneficial

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<sup>26</sup> In Mexican historiography, debates have raged over the relative power of the state with some scholars characterizing the state as a monolith and “employing a ‘transmission model’ of culture that equated national culture with state ideology” (Hayes 2000: 8). Meanwhile other scholars have emphasized regional culture and have portrayed the state as “a slow and wobbly ‘jalopy’” rather than an “overpowering ‘juggernaut’” (ibid.: 9). This dissertation presents evidence that questions the notion of the state as monolith, while acknowledging that how the state is perceived by the populace is, arguably, what is most significant in studies of popular culture.

<sup>27</sup> Díaz led via his proxy and ally, Manuel González, from 1880-1884.

international relations, and increased wealth for the elite. By 1910, however, Mexicans of varied socio-economic and geographic positions began questioning the dictator and his approach. A group of young leaders, including Francisco Madero, began an anti-reelection campaign in the hopes of ousting Díaz. Madero, pursued by Díaz's henchmen, retreated to the United States and, in exile, campaigned for the end of the Porfiriato. Bands of like-minded followers took up arms throughout the country with Pancho Villa and Pascual Orozco leading the alliance in the north and Emiliano Zapata orchestrating the peasant uprisings in the south. "The 'Maderistas' troops, and the national anger which inspired them, defeated the army of Díaz within six months" (Consul General of Mexico 1996).

After Díaz was deposed, a protracted civil war raged in Mexico with former allies turning against one another in a struggle for power and domination. In the twenty-three years following Díaz's removal, Mexico had fourteen different presidents. The fifteenth, Lázaro Cárdenas, elected in 1934, is particularly significant because he would come to represent the ideals of the revolution. Cárdenas is said to have been a man of "rigid honesty" and someone "who could not be bought" (Tuck 1999). Cárdenas was lenient with striking workers; he nationalized the petroleum industry and expropriated the assets of seventeen foreign oil companies; he restored the *ejido* land system which broke up large haciendas and restored land to the peasants and indigenous people to whom the land originally belonged; and he funded a national secular school system, combating the "fanaticism" of the Catholic Church (ibid.). Of symbolic importance, Cárdenas refused to live in Chapultepec Castle, the White House for Mexican presidents. He also cut his salary in half, was inaugurated in a business suit instead of a military uniform, and would receive barefoot peasants before attending to politicians and businessmen who came to see him (ibid.). In sum, Cárdenas

embodied Revolutionary ideals centered on nationalism, the redistribution of wealth and resources, and a focus on peasants and workers over the elite.

The Mexican Revolution left the country regionally divided and ravaged many of its resources. Post-Revolutionary governments (under Cárdenas and others) set out to rebuild the nation after that difficult period. Their efforts included redoubled attempts at industrialization, modernization, and agricultural subsistence. Additionally, they sought to overcome deep regional divides and to transform a heterogeneous nation into a unified one behind which citizens would mobilize and for whose greater good they would work. Post-Revolutionary hopes of prosperity were therefore tied to transformation and economic growth and these dreams of modernization were articulated in popular culture forms, increased commodification, and changing consumption practices (Moreno 2007). Also at stake was post-Revolutionary national identity and citizens debated what “Mexico” would mean in the early twentieth century.

In the world of music, for example, in 1926 the newspaper *El Universal* convened Mexico’s First National Congress of Music (Madrid 2006). Taking place during the early days of the post-Revolutionary period, the congress demonstrates the considerable interest in and concern over ideas of the nation, nationalism, modernity, and modernism. Participants held diverging opinions about what “Mexican” music was and should be and articulated political and cultural debates about “indigenismo” (the valorization of Mexico’s indigenous roots) and cosmopolitanism. People were divided between the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the Mexican, regional pride and national unity. Tension between competing values characterized the congress and, later, came to characterize the Mexican state’s relationship with modernity. As music scholar Alejandro Madrid explains:

Indeed, Mexico was inundated with a large variety of imagined versions of nationality, modernity, and tradition. The congress shows that a national music was

not dictated by the new government in concert with a few artistic stars but instead emerged through a process of negotiation performed by intellectuals, artists, politicians, and private entrepreneurs of many different tendencies (Madrid 2006: 706).

Holding on to both sides of the binary while attempting to find a way forward was a complex and intricate dance that would continue for decades and involve myriad stakeholders.

In order to understand the struggle over national identity and how it played out in the realm of popular music in Mexico from the 1930s to the 1970s, it must be related to the rise of another mass medium, Mexican cinema. Though radio had played popular music to regional markets since the 1920s, films utilized popular music extensively, reached a national audience, established stars who excelled in both acting and singing, and effectively served as long-form music videos (Rubenstein 2001: 212). This “golden age” of Mexican cinema (variously dated from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s) embodied the hope and excitement of the post-Revolutionary period. Perceiving the expansion of films from the United States as a threat to national identity formation, the Mexican government maintained tight control of the industry, which it saw as particularly useful for reinforcing nationalist values and a sense of “Mexicanidad,” or Mexican-ness. Mexico historian Anne Rubenstein explains:

The film industry came to depend on the state, in ways both obvious and subtle. Besides the crucial financial support it offered, government regulated every aspect of the industry, from the content of the scripts to the cleanliness of the movie houses. Such regulation in itself supported the industry by making both the movies themselves and the venues in which they played seem relatively wholesome, even patriotic, and thus more appealing to audiences (Rubenstein 2000: 652).

Films communicated proper social behavior and taught viewers how to be good citizens.

Institutions such as the government, the police, the church, and the patriarchal family were portrayed as benign and above reproach (ibid.).

As noted above, music was central to many films with both the songs and their singers becoming icons of Mexican identity. One of these actor/singers was Pedro Infante who, through the course of his career, came to personify many ideals of Mexican masculinity: “the *charro* (cowboy) who is also a modern urban man, the macho with a tender heart, the working stiff and the rich guy too. But in all of his guises, Infante represents a living vision of what it might mean to be Mexican” (Rubenstein 2001: 200). Infante embodied this vision, in large part, through his performance of *ranchera* music. *Ranchera* is said to have originated in the state of Jalisco in the center-West of the country (Jáuregui 2007). A *mariachi* band typically performs *ranchera* and both *ranchera* and *mariachi* became staples of Mexican popular music and film during cinema’s “golden age.” While originally linked to a particular geographic region, the music exploded in popularity across the nation thanks to singing film stars such as Infante, Jorge Negrete, and María Félix (Vaughan 2001). In his analysis of Mexico’s *mariachi* music, Mexican anthropologist Jesús Jáuregui states: “The consolidation of mariachi as a modern national symbol was produced in strict relation with the ‘idols’ of the ranchera songs. These characters were created by the triad of radio, records, and film, with the active participation of fervent admirers” (Jáuregui 2007: 74). Jáuregui explains that these “idols” became well known for their expression of “Mexican” values such as “bravery, pride, integrity, and regionalism, with a permanent shade of macho bragging” (ibid.: 75).

For all its efforts to manage the production, distribution, and content of popular cinema and music, however, the state could not dictate how these were received. As symbols of Mexico’s burgeoning modernity, movies and movie theaters also connoted – for some – all that was dangerous about modernity (Rubenstein 2001: 217-218). Ticket prices were inexpensive, theaters were dark, and love stories were enacted by larger than life characters,

some of whom had questionable morals both on and off screen. All of these factors combined to create concerns about morality, the behavior of young people, and social etiquette in a new public space (Rubenstein 2000: 654). Nevertheless, although the reception of film and its accompanying *ranchera* music were problematic, the Mexican government continued to consider them “ideal instruments for articulating a national mythology” (Hayes 2000: xvii).

Unquestionably promoted by the Mexican government via its influence over the film and the recording industry, *ranchera* symbolized an idealized masculinity (patriarchy, sex-appeal, bravery, bravado, strength, and stability), traditional (country) ways of life, and self-sufficiency. As part of Mexico’s growing national cinema, *ranchera* was also able, paradoxically, to evoke a sense of the modern. This sense of modernity in *ranchera*, however, was subtle and by association; the music itself evoked traditional values. *Bolero* music, on the other hand, was urban, modern, edgy, provocative, and forward-looking. *Bolero* came to Mexico from Cuba and via the Eastern coastal state of Veracruz (Monsiváis 1997: 178). While foreign in origin, and therefore automatically viewed with suspicion since the Porfiriato, Monsiváis explains that *bolero* was “nationalized” by 1919 and achieved its first hit by 1924 (ibid.). A type of romantic ballad typically played on piano, *bolero* themes could not be more different from those of *ranchera*. Though both spoke of love, *boleros*, especially those of Agustín Lara, valorized and romanticized the harlot, the prostitute, the working girl of the city (Couture 2001). Mexican *boleros* were sad, aching, melodramatic tales capable of transgressing traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, and class (ibid.: 78). According to one scholar of Mexican popular culture, Mark Couture, Lara’s *boleros* challenged Mexico’s hypocritical, prudish society yet gradually became staples of mainstream popular music (ibid.: 73).

While somewhat successful in film, *bolero* consolidated its popularity through radio and the prolificacy of its songwriters (Monsiváis 1997; Hayes 2000; Couture 2001). While the state exercised considerable control over radio through licensing, regulation, protectionism, and even censorship, the commercial viability of the recording industry and the fact that nationalistic government policies required that radio stations play Mexican content meant that the state was not as involved with the particulars of radio content as it was with film content (Hayes 2000: 37-39). Still, radio was seen as a modern tool and a means of bringing education to rural, indigenous masses in order to civilize them (Hayes 2000: 43; Rubenstein 2000: 646-647). *Bolero*, with all its modern sensibilities, ironically proved immensely popular with rural radio listeners who acknowledged the frivolity of Lara and other *bolero* singers, but expressed a preference for that kind of music (Hayes 2000: 59).

The considerable tension in post-Revolutionary Mexico between celebrating the country's indigenous roots and condemning them as backward and in need of improvement so as to meet European cosmopolitan ideals played itself out in debates about *bolero* (ibid. 49). In spite of its popularity, *bolero* was controversial enough that some of Lara's songs were banned from school music recitals and a conservative radio station elected to no longer play *boleros* (Rubenstein 2001: 210). Nevertheless, other commercial radio broadcasters, specifically the Azcárraga Group, which dominated the radio industry at the time and for decades to come, set itself up as the preeminent nationalist broadcaster, adhered to government mandates for nationalistic content, and played both *rancheras* and *boleros* (ibid.). The Azcárraga Group, thus, held in tension the traditional and the modern, nostalgia for a romanticized past and hope for a cosmopolitan future. It epitomized the same tension felt by the government – to move the nation forward while holding on to core, traditional values.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, the Mexican government actively worked to create a unified nation based on Revolutionary values upon which it intended to form a modern, industrialized state with significant economic growth and prosperity. Official use of the mass media and popular culture was made in the construction of what anthropologist Néstor García Canclini calls the “national-popular ideal” (García Canclini 2001: xxii). This ideal came under fire by the mid-1960s when efforts at modernization and industrialization stagnated and increased nationalist rhetoric served to divide the country yet again. Rock music, recently arrived from Mexico’s Northern neighbor, would find itself caught up in these tensions.

### The State’s Encounter with Rock Music

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Rock music came to Mexico much like it did to the rest of the world – in the 1950s on a wave of popularity and with the frenzy of youth. Because rock music in Mexico was limited to those with access to records or to venues where rock music was performed, it was primarily a middle and upper class phenomenon. By the late 1950s, however, Mexican youth were making their own rock music; for several years they copied their idols from the United States and the United Kingdom. Later, they sang Spanish versions of English language rock and roll hits. By the mid 1960s they were writing their own songs, though they chose to do so in English and in keeping with the worldwide phenomenon that was rock ‘n’ roll (Arana and Enea 2002; Zolov 1999).<sup>28</sup>

Rock music and the young people who embraced it confused the Mexican state. At first rock’s arrival was seen as an indicator of the country’s modernity. It was considered a wholesome form of entertainment, as well as a commercial product that reflected the growth

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<sup>28</sup> For comprehensive accounts of early rock ‘n’ roll in Mexico see Frederico Arana’s *Guarachas de Ante Azul: Historia del roc mexicano (Blue Suede Sandals: History of Mexican rock)*, first published in 1985 and Eric Zolov’s *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, published in 1999.

and internationalization of Mexico's new consumer culture. Thus, "rock and roll properly controlled by government regulation and music industry self-policing, represents a positive cultural influence that promotes modern values and, in this capacity, it has sometimes received official support" (Coerver, Spasztor, and Buffington 2004: 441). However, as psychedelic rock took hold in the US and the UK and drug culture replaced the happy-go-lucky feel of early rock, the Mexican state became concerned (ibid.). In short order, as a foreign-inspired musical genre, "frequently condemned by government officials and the intelligentsia as an agent of imperialism" (Zolov 1999: 9), rock quickly became antithetical to the official nationalism the state had sought so hard to institutionalize through the promotion of *ranchera* and *bolero* on the radio and in film.

In their efforts to control the spread and influence of rock music, the government turned to regulation. The 1960 Federal Law of Radio and Television made the government's desires clear. It read:

1. To affirm the respect for social morality, human dignity and family ties;
2. To avoid noxious or disturbing influences on the harmonious development of children and youth;
3. To contribute to the cultural elevation of the population and to conserve its national characteristics, customs, and traditions, the propriety of the language, and to exalt the values of Mexican nationality;
4. To strengthen democratic convictions, national unity, and international friendship and cooperation (in Zolov 1999: 59).

The position of the state toward rock music was exemplified in its overt censorship of many youth-focused films with rock soundtracks such as those by Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and James Dean (ibid.: 55). Holding fast to idealized images of proper decorum and behavior for young people, these films and the rock music contained within were abhorrent to the "national-popular ideal" (García Canclini 2001: xxii).

The government's crackdown on youth behavior was most clear in two brutal massacres of student protesters in 1968 and 1971. While the student protest movements of

the 1960s and 1970s were *not* associated with rock music, the government's reaction to non-conforming young people and to critiques of government policies were swift, harsh, and unrelenting and illustrate the precarious situation in which young rock fans found themselves (Poniatowska 2002: 564). For months, the government's distaste for student protesters had been mounting, as students, professors, writers, and intellectuals joined forces. As Mexican social commentator Elena Poniatowska writes, "Against what? The apparent pretexts could have been anything, but fundamentally they protested against misery, imposition, and corruption" after years of patiently waiting for the ideals of the Revolution to be realized (ibid.: 556). Poniatowska explains that "the government's terror" of the increasingly outspoken protestors "continued to rise till it reached a boiling point" and with "the eyes of the world... upon us," in the lead up to the 1968 Olympics, the government took a drastic step (ibid.: 563). On October 2, in the public plaza known as Tlatelolco, the Mexican army opened fire on peaceful protesters, killing many.<sup>29</sup>

The effects of the Tlatelolco massacre and the subsequent Corpus Christi massacre on June 10, 1971 – in which student and teacher protesters were violently suppressed and twenty-five were killed by a plain-clothed police force (the US-trained "Los Halcones") (Doyle 2003) – were profound and dramatically shaped the relationship between youth and the state. It became appallingly clear that anti-government sentiments would not be tolerated and that the only acceptable position for Mexican youth to take was grateful, law-abiding complicity. Poniatowska argues that the student movement of 1968 "destroyed the official image of Mexico... lustrous, full of blue skies and promises" (ibid.: 557). Nevertheless, the PRI government would strive mightily to hold on to that image, tarnished though it was, for another twenty years.

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<sup>29</sup> The exact number of fatalities is still not known but estimates have ranged from four to 3,000 (Richman and Diaz-Cortes 2008).

The music festival at Avándaro in 1971 (described at the beginning of this chapter) was an attempt to return to peaceful normalcy. Young people, the media, and commercial interests were intrigued by the latest manifestation of Mexican rock – non-imitative, home-grown, Spanish language rock music by and for Mexicans (Zolov 1999: 202). According to historian Eric Zolov, attempts to make Avándaro political were rejected by participants. For most festival goers, Mexican rock was about *desmadre*, youthful abandon, partying, and having a good time (ibid.: 203). Mexico’s native rock movement was perceived as a growing countercultural movement, however, and newly elected President Luis Echeverría decided to take no chances; he turned to the repressive police and military forces to quiet it down (ibid.: 167). As one *roquero* of the time recalls:

We were the weirdos, los greñudos [longhairs].... They harassed us wherever we went.... Perhaps like what happened in other countries with racism, only here it was directed toward the *roquero*.... Like they wouldn’t let you on the bus, ridiculous things like that. Wherever you went, there were the cops. The cops came after you, they beat you, they robbed you (in Zolov 1999: 165).

President Echeverría also utilized state influence of the mass media industries to wreak havoc on Mexican rock and its fans: “Rock concerts were cancelled, record contracts severed (or left to languish), and repression set in as native rock was eliminated from the airwaves” (Zolov 2004: 40). The mass media, which had seen potential in Mexican rock music at the time of the Avándaro festival, quickly reverted to the same pro-government stance they had taken during the student protests in 1968, or face fines, temporary imprisonment of DJs, and even revocation of their operating licenses (Zolov 1999: 218, 2004: 31). Oddly, Echeverría embraced *canción protesta* the overtly political, socialist-leaning folk music emanating from Venezuela, Cuba, Chile, and other parts of Latin America (Zolov 1999; Rubenstein 2000). Sanctioned by a repressive regime, however, *canción protesta* lost much of its edge in Mexico, but nevertheless was consumed by youth of the middle class

(ibid.). Mexican rock, meanwhile, was pushed to the margins. Lacking commercial and industry support, it managed to stay alive through performances in out of the way locations. “Left to ferment in the barrios, rock music would eventually rear its defiant head once more, only this time in the voice of the truly marginalized (Zolov 1999: 233).

What would come of Mexico’s rock music is the subject of the rest of this dissertation. Before describing its trajectory from the early 1980s to the present, however, challenges to the state’s monopoly over national identity construction will be discussed.

### The Beginning of the End of Official Nationalism

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After decades of efforts to create a unified nation with a distinct, identifiable national identity – and amid notable prosperity and considerable economic growth – a critique of official nationalism began to emerge (Rubenstein 2000: 664). Attempts to squelch nonconformity and critique were frequent, however, as the government worked to reinforce the image of a modern, industrialized nation attractive to tourists and investors alike. Hosting the 1968 Olympics was Mexico’s coming out party, an opportunity to show the world the dynamic, lively spirit of a modern, forward looking nation rooted in the centuries-long history of an advanced, ancient civilization (Sackett 2006; Zolov 2001: 259). But, as evidenced by the student protests described above, many Mexican citizens were becoming increasingly troubled by the disconnect between their lived experiences and the official rhetoric of nationalism and modernization being supplied by the PRI. As will be shown below, both sides of the precarious balance between tradition and modernity were threatened.

For example, historian Anne Rubenstein describes how when legendary film star and icon of *ranchera* music Pedro Infante died in 1957, his fans blamed modernity for their loss.

Infante's characters had built a bridge from the traditional (in his early movies) to the modern (in his later roles). Infante personified this arc and made it possible to believe that as a collective, Mexicans too could have both (Rubenstein 2001: 220-221). When he died in a plane crash (planes being the ultimate symbol of modernity in the late 1950s), modernity's powerful presence unleashed nostalgia for a simpler, romanticized past. Infante's death was covered in great detail by the mass media, and although the media were complicit in his idolization, fans also saw the media as symbols of Mexico's increasingly modern ways. Explaining the riot that broke out at Infante's Mexico City funeral, which over 150,000 people attended, Rubenstein writes:

[I]t was a logical step to blame those responsible for modernity for the loss of the idol himself; thus, the crowd turned on the police, who were the nearest representatives of the state, in place of turning on the state itself. It was Mexico's "revolutionary" government, after all, that had most loudly and insistently demanded credit for the modernization of Mexico. Thus, as in other moments of national disaster, it would also have to take its share of the blame (ibid.: 221).

With Infante's death, so too died the dream that Mexico could somehow reconcile its modernizing ambitions with its desire to hold onto its traditional past. Again, Rubenstein's description of the impact of Infante's death is poignant:

Infante's death closed off the possibility that "modernity" (the oldest of Mexican political goals) and "tradition" (a postrevolutionary construct) could be bridged in a way that made sense to his fans. It condemned them to remain in the decaying center of the cities while the elite margins thrived. It forced them to pick between opposing gender definitions, rather than pick and choose among them. The fans violently objected. In doing so, they told the police, and, by extension, the state and the entertainment industry that supported it, that they were growing tired of a national narrative in which they did not yet have a speaking part (ibid.: 228).

Infante was gone and the struggling nation mourned.

Simultaneously, folkloric imaginings of the nation – the emphasis on indigenismo, and the romanticization of Mexico's pre-colonial civilizations – had become tiresome for many (Zolov 2001: 257). Mexican social commentator, Carlos Monsiváis, describes how the

folkloric had become commodified, for sale to tourists. Many modern citizens of Mexico, however, opted for cosmopolitanism, modernity, and commercial “freedom” instead (Monsiváis 1997: 24). The government’s efforts to fabricate a sense of national unity played into these cosmopolitan ideals. As Monsiváis writes, “Everything is absorbed by the spectacle of national growth, the show at which dams, motorways, stadiums, and universities are unveiled” (ibid.: 18-19). These efforts toward modernization were easily recognized and widely seen. Unlike the Pedro Infante fans described above, many other Mexicans embraced notions of progress, while they rejected the constraints of tradition, and turned a blind eye to state repression.

By the late 1960s, and in spite of the state’s efforts to hold the multiple sides of “lo mexicano” together, Mexicans became well aware of the divide between the traditional and the modern, the indigenous and the cosmopolitan, the national and the foreign. Cracks in the state’s façade were already beginning to show, but the massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968 shone a light on them. Monsiváis describes 1968 as tragic and pathetic. He says:

[I]t established, once more, as a limit case, that our system is paternalistic, and that it punishes; that it is boastful, and defiantly assumes the monopolization of the power to punish; that it is melodramatic, and displaces its guilt on to the punishment of others; ... that it is didactic and has circular arguments, and punishes the victims of punishment (ibid.: 27).

In the end, all these things and many more were learned from the experience of Tlatelolco, e.g., “the limits and weaknesses of manipulation and cover-up [were] observed” (ibid.).

Rock music arrived in Mexico in the midst of these tensions. A backlash was taking place against the Mexican state’s construction of the nation, of what it meant to be modern, and what it meant to be a good citizen. Zolov explains that Mexico had its Avándaro generation who were “marked by the defeatism of the 1968 movement... who experienced a cultural rebellion tied to rock music... who challenged the values of their parents and in turn

challenged the legitimacy of the PRI itself' (Zolov 1999: 16). This generation of young people demonstrated that there were new and different ways of being Mexican. They insisted on separating the idea of the "nation" from the state and, thus, undermined the long cultivated and deeply ingrained images and rhetoric of the post-Revolutionary nation-state. The PRI government identified itself "more and more absolutely with the Nation," as such, speaking against one was also speaking against the other (Monsiváis 1997: 19). But rather than seeing rock music as an authentic means of popular cultural expression by and for Mexicans, some members of the artistic, philosophical, and academic intelligentsia saw the Avándaro generation as deeply influenced, even duped by US imperialism (Zolov 1999: 216). The fact that Mexican rockers sang in English, dressed in the international "hippie" style, and idolized foreign musicians indicated to many "the collapse of a credible discourse of revolutionary nationalism, the older, officially prescribed boundaries of Mexican identity were no longer held to be sacred" (Zolov 2004: 35).

The state had attempted to control *ranchera* and *bolero* through its relationship with the mass media, and it benefitted from the fact that these extremely popular musical genres largely conformed to ideals of the Mexican nation (with its investment in the past *and* the future). After all, even when *bolero* pushed boundaries, its widespread popularity coupled with its realistic depictions of a part of Mexican society that everyone knew about but were not supposed to talk about effectively brought it into the mainstream. Mexican rock music, on the other hand, pointed out the tensions between the modern and the traditional that were also being debated throughout Mexican society and which threatened to destabilize it. To its detriment, Mexican rock also symbolized the increasing appeal of foreign popular culture forms over "national" ones, such as *ranchera* and *bolero*. In presenting different ways of being Mexican that did not fit into nationalist rhetoric, rock music and its fans demanded

the “speaking part” in the national narrative (which Rubenstein referred to above) and were positioned as countercultural and a threat to the state’s legitimacy and authority. President Echeverría underscored these characterizations of rock music in his efforts to “reclaim the state’s symbolic role as cultural arbiter and defender of national borders” (Zolov 1999: 217). The clampdown began and, as described above, Mexican rock temporarily disappeared.

## Conclusion

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The nation building of post-Revolutionary Mexico was filled with tensions and negotiations. The government, despite its best efforts, was not able to act unilaterally. Rather, it had complex relationships with other powerful forces, such as the mass media and their wealthy owners, artists, intellectuals, and popular music fans. Official nationalism created through the articulation of a unified national identity was the cornerstone of the post-Revolutionary government, an important factor in its legitimation and prolonged stability. This cornerstone was reinforced through two of the most popular genres of music of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s – *ranchera* and *bolero*. While the state had an intricate relationship with these forms of popular culture through its control of the mass media, it did not have a contentious relationship with them. Rock music on the other hand posed a threat to the state because of its ability to challenge understandings of the “nation” and its attempts to separate the idea of the nation from the exclusive control of the state. President Echeverría’s containment of rock was successful in debilitating it and forcing it underground for a decade. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the destabilization of the Mexican state during the late 1970s and 1980s created the opportunity for the reemergence of Mexico’s rock music and its re-articulation of what it means to be Mexican.

## Chapter IV

### The Rebirth of Homegrown Rock:

#### Fighting for the Right to Exist (1980-1988)

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##### Prelude: Tianguis Cultural del Chopo

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*El Tianguis Cultural del Chopo, or “El Chopo” for short, opened on October 4, 1980 as the brainchild of Angeles Mastretta and Jorge Pontoja of the Organización Pro Música y Arte (Pro-Music and Art Organization) (Ríos Manzano 2005). Every Saturday since, it has been a gathering place for people who are interested in rock music and rock paraphernalia. Similar to a neighborhood street fair or farmers’ market in the United States, tianguis (a Nahuatl word for open air market) are common throughout Mexico and typically sell food, household items, or crafts. El Chopo is dedicated solely to rock music and is the only tianguis of its kind in Mexico. While the tianguis changed location a few times in its early days, El Chopo eventually established itself near Mexico City’s Buenavista train terminal, subway stop, and MetroBus stop (above ground rapid transit line). Far from the buy-sell environment of the market today, El Chopo began as a place to barter and trade albums, posters, or t-shirts with other rock music fanatics. Because rock music was largely unavailable through commercial avenues in Mexico in the early 1980s, when El Chopo opened, several of its vendors dedicated themselves to the sale of LPs and cassettes purchased at used record stores in the United States and smuggled into Mexico (ibid.: 24). Other vendors distributed “lo-fi” recordings of Mexican artists who were struggling to get their music out because of tight restrictions on the professional production of rock. Since its earliest days, El Chopo has been recognized as a place of acceptance and tolerance of rockeros of all sorts and, particularly during the 1980s, the epicenter of Mexico’s counterculture (ibid.: 21).*

*If you arrive at El Chopo using public transportation, as the vast majority of young people do, you know you are getting closer to the appropriate stop, not by reading the maps and signs on the subway or the MetroBus, but because of the young people who start to fill the cars. Their presence is made obvious by their Chopo-best, that is, abundant piercings, tattoos, heavy black Doc Marten boots (or knock-offs),*

wallet chains, studded belts, shaved heads, mohawks, or vibrantly colored hair (purple, green, and red, for example). For thirty years, El Chopo has been a gathering place for rock music fans of all types – punks, goths, darks, hippies, Rastafarians, Rude Boys, skinheads, and emos make up most of the identifiable youth music subcultures represented. As Mexican social critic and commentator Carlos Monsiváis observes, “Y los chavos del tianguis están, a su modo, en la onda, son lo trendy en el arrabal, la vanguardia contracultural...” (“And the young people of the tianguis are, in their own way, in the wave,<sup>30</sup> they are the trendy in the suburb, the countercultural vanguard...”) (quoted in Torres Medina 2002: 171). And so while these young people may attract considerable attention outside of El Chopo, it is the relatively straight-laced looking parents of tweens, the few foreigners, and the older men and women selling food and drink that look out-of-place here. In El Chopo, difference is the norm and the common, unifying factor is rock music.

Temporary puestos (stands) line both sides of the street, with a double row in the middle, which creates two side-by-side aisles that extend down the length of two city blocks. The puestos are constructed of royal blue tarps – the effect is an oasis, an oasis for rock music fans, where they can find stands devoted to endless rock sub-genres. If the album sought is not available, vendors promise to acquire it by the following week. No matter where you wander in the market, music shreds the air. It comes from speakers of all sizes and varying quality, and is played in almost every one of the hundreds of stands. It is virtually impossible to distinguish one vendor’s output from another until you are standing directly in front of their puesto. The cacophony reminds you where you are and why you have come. So packed with people and merchandise, you simply move slowly, curiously, with the crowd of hundreds until the merchandise on display in a particular stand catches your eye. A stage is set up at the back of the market and each week a lineup of unknown bands attempts to grow its fan base among those gathered at El Chopo. According to musicologist Violeta Torres Medina:

*El tianguis del Chopo puede ser visto como un escenario ambulante sobre el cual han nacido, crecido y fenecido muchos groups de rock; donde*

*El Chopo can be seen as a moving stage on which many groups have been born, grown, and passed away; where some have earned recognition and*

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<sup>30</sup> “La onda” (“the wave”) is a reference to Mexico’s youth counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s which produced a number of literary giants, social commentators, and people who would later become important public intellectuals (Zolov 2004).

*algunos ganaron reconocimiento y vieron el proceso de consolidación del cantar en español y el encuentro con el ser “rocanrolero” .... También ha sido foro para la gestión de colectividades de jóvenes... (Torres Medina 2002: 172).*

*[all] have seen the consolidation of singing in Spanish and have met the “rock and roller”.... It has also been a forum for the management of youth collectives....*

*Occasionally, more popular bands that got their start at El Chopo will return here to perform a free concert. These concerts often attract newcomers to El Chopo, which provides recognition for the market itself, revenue for the vendors, and a reminder to emerging talent that this is a place where dreams begin.*

## Introduction

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The preceding chapter described the relationship between popular music and the Mexican state from the 1920s through the 1970s. This chapter is the first in a series that examines how that relationship changed from the 1980s through the 2000s. In particular, chapter four looks at the years that marked the re-birth of homegrown Mexican rock, from approximately 1980-1988, before Mexican rock and the genre known as *rock en español* exploded in international and domestic popularity and commercial success. This chapter begins by describing the political, economic, and social contexts of the time. Particular attention is paid to the economic collapse of the early 1980s, the political inefficiency of the government, the rise of civil society, and the resulting demise of the PRI. The chapter then turns to youth, describing *los chavos banda* – a term that emerged in the 1980s and became synonymous with all Mexican youth – and how they experienced what came to be referred to as “the lost decade.” Next, the sound of Mexico’s new *rock nacional* (national rock), “*guacarock*,” is described, as it forms a central part of the identity of *los chavos banda* and their efforts to carve out spaces for themselves in Mexico’s tightly controlled cultural environment. The role of the mass media in this process – led by radio and a few pioneering record companies – is covered next. The chapter concludes with a discussion of homegrown

Mexican rock's attempts to fight for the right to exist and why this fight was crucial for youth expression in the early 1980s and throughout the subsequent decade.

### The Lost Decade: Mexico's Political, Economic, and Social Landscapes

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Rock's powerful re-emergence in Mexico in the 1980s coincided with the demise of the country's ruling party of more than seventy years, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI). After years of modernization efforts led by import substitution industrialization (ISI), hefty government subsidies, and focused infrastructural development in resort towns, in 1976 Mexico discovered its large oil resources were actually much larger than it had imagined (Adler Hellman 1999: 2). Estimates that Mexico's oil reserves were even greater than those of Saudi Arabia led to increased foreign investment and dramatic spending in the public sector paid for, largely, by foreign debt (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, as loans grew, global over-production of oil decimated prices. Mexico was left deeply in debt and without the hoped-for cash flow from oil revenues with which it had planned to claw its way out. A major peso devaluation in 1982 added to the economic pain. A devastating earthquake in 1985 soon proved too much for the PRI struggling as it was to maintain its monolithic reach. This section delves more deeply into these political, economic, and social factors, which contributed to the PRI's eventual demise.

Impressive economic growth from the 1940s to the 1970s allowed the PRI to shore up its position at the zenith of power in Mexico. The party utilized economic gains to deepen and further entrench its power leading to a period of great stability in Mexican society throughout the middle of the twentieth century. During this period, Mexico famously lived out the "Mexican miracle" – an economic growth rate of more than six percent annually, successful adoption and use of import substitution industrialization, and a strong

currency tied to the US dollar (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009). Economic development, industrial and commercial modernization, increased urbanization, and Mexico's investment in impressive infrastructural and institutional projects (e.g., building in preparation for the 1968 Olympics and a consistent commitment to the national university) greatly contributed to its enhanced reputation abroad, but, as explained in the previous chapter, continued high levels of inequality and government repression dampened ordinary Mexicans' enthusiasm for the PRI.<sup>31</sup> Historian Judith Adler Hellman explains: "However impressive the overall growth rates may have been, these years of rapid economic expansion were also marked by one of the most unequal patterns of income distribution in the world" (Adler Hellman 1999: 1). By 1980 the richest five percent of Mexicans "enjoyed incomes 50 times greater than those of the poorest sector of the population" (ibid.). "While the private and industrial sectors did very well, most Mexicans suffered from the side effects of growing inflation, stagnant wages, high unemployment, and inadequate public services" (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 94). This deepening inequality undermined the PRI's legitimacy.

When Mexico sunk into a downward economic spiral in the mid-1970s, it seemed that the PRI's political and social control might be weakening. Nonetheless, and in a glaring display of the PRI's still impressive political monopoly, José López Portillo (1976-1982) ran unopposed in his bid for the presidency in 1975 and inherited a Mexico facing "its most serious economic crisis ever with a mushrooming public deficit, a currency devaluation that resulted in the peso's loss of half its value, rising inflation, and stagnant real wages" (ibid.: 98). Hope came with the discovery of vast oil reserves that promised to reverse Mexico's

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<sup>31</sup> The fiasco that surrounded Mexico's international debut at the 1968 Olympics highlights these tensions. Enormous structures were erected and Mexico City was polished to a shine for the events, but the massacre at Tlatelolco days before illuminated the cracks in the façade (Adler Hellman 1999: 1; Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 95).

fortunes, provide an opportunity for the country to bounce back economically and for the PRI to bounce back politically.

López Portillo's efforts to bring about economic stability during an economic boom included a dramatic *reduction* in government spending on public services (food subsidies, wages, and job creation), accompanied by heavy government *investment* in the petroleum industry and other high-priced industrial development projects (ibid.: 99-100). Because making money from oil reserves would take some time, the government borrowed heavily to pay for its new investments. International lenders looked favorably on Mexico because of its promise of oil and happily lent more and more. The oil revenue that did come in, however, was insufficient to cover both spending and debt repayment. Meanwhile, the government was unable to control inflation. In 1982, with internal and external pressure mounting, López Portillo was forced to devalue the peso resulting in a thirty percent loss in the currency's value. "This meant not only that Mexicans' purchasing power declined substantially—the rate of inflation had increased to a whopping 100 percent—but also that Mexico's foreign debt nearly doubled to \$80 billion" (ibid.). Less-than-expected oil revenues in 1982 and an economic growth rate of zero led López Portillo to nationalize domestically owned banks to avoid capital flight and further destabilization.

Thus began what is now referred to as "the lost decade" of the 1980s. Given the economic catastrophes that beset the country, it is no surprise that the poor and working classes (i.e., the majority of Mexico's population) suffered greatly during this period. Adler Hellman notes that by 1986 almost two-thirds of urban households had incomes below the official poverty line, joblessness had doubled, wages declined, and prices went up (Adler Hellman 1999: 9). Government austerity measures employed to get the economy in check meant public services such as transportation, health care, subsidized housing, and the like

were gutted, further devastating the poor and working classes. “Mexico awakened from its oil-boom dream to a decade of wrenching economic crisis” (Olvera 2004: 414).<sup>32</sup>

Disgruntled with government policy and worsening living conditions, social movements began to develop, but they were young, lacked experience, and were without an infrastructure to support their efforts. The incipient women’s movement, environmental movement, and human rights movement had little influence, for the PRI had successfully used repression, co-optation, and integration to quiet them (Monsiváis in Olvera 2004: 411, 414). Still, their presence demonstrated a growing understanding that a more active civil society was needed; a sphere distinct from government and capable of serving as a symbolic response to an authoritarian regime turning its back on Revolutionary promises (and all of their social welfare rhetoric).

In September 1985, Mexico was challenged yet again when a devastating earthquake struck the geographic, political, and economic heart of the country – Mexico City and its surrounding states. The country’s nascent civil sphere rose to the challenge, providing goods, services, medical help, and rebuilding assistance when the PRI proved itself incompetent and self-serving. One organizer recalls that after the earthquake they received word that barrels of drinking water were held up for several days “because they had to put the PRI’s logo on them” (Paco Saucedo in Joseph and Henderson 2002: 579). Another organizer recounts: “The official policy was always to minimize the problem, to create an image that nothing was going on here.... The Department of the Federal District washed its hands of us, saying that they were as much victims as we were, that they didn’t order the earthquake, it wasn’t their fault” (Cuauhtémoc Abarca in *ibid.*: 583). President de la Madrid (who succeeded López

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<sup>32</sup> Social scientist Alberto Olvera notes some disturbing statistics: GDP fell 4.5 percent in 1983 and 1986 and averaged a zero percent growth rate from 1983-1988. During the same period real wages dropped an average of 35.3 percent. Investment in education and health decreased 45.2 percent and “the decline in living standards was Mexico’s worst since the 1910-1920 revolution” (Olvera 2004: 413-414).

Portillo from 1982-1988) underestimated (or ignored) the severity of the crisis, choosing to reject foreign assistance in the days following the quake. When the President finally did accept external aid, it was severely hampered by the PRI machine's efforts to control and brand it for their own purposes (for a more detailed account of this period see Adler Hellman 1988).

The solidarity that erupted among Mexico's citizens, however, was life-changing for many and would ultimately lend a hand in dissolving the PRI's monopoly on power. When Leslie Serna helped organize a neighborhood meeting, instead of the two neighborhoods that were expected to come, representatives from sixty arrived (in Joseph and Henderson 2002: 580). Alejandro Varas recalls "there was a great civil reaction that awakened an anti-authoritarian sentiment" (ibid.: 583). Gloria Amador, seventeen at the time, was galvanized by the government's inadequacy:

I joined because it seemed very unjust to me that they could do such a thing [demolish a building where people were still living after the quake].... And from that time on I began a daily routine of distributing fliers, going to meetings, and that happened all at once, like the disaster itself; as if suddenly I had no prior life (ibid.: 582).

Dolores Padierna had a similar experience: "A friend of mine named Marilú, an earthquake victim from the Colonia [neighborhood] Doctores, invited me to participate with her. We began a new history that would change my life radically" (ibid.). Reeling from years of government corruption, cronyism, and graft that was becoming impossible to ignore, and inspired to act because of the PRI's blatant disavowal of the problems and widespread ineffectiveness, citizens were empowered. Their actions animated others. Sold a steady diet of repression-tinged "progress" by their leaders and lulled into complacency, Mexico's citizenry slowly but surely woke up – in large part thanks to the efforts of its newly effective civil society.

Beginning in the 1970s, the PRI began enacting a series of electoral reforms that served to pacify the opposition while also splintering it (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 95). The tumult of the 1980s finally provided enough motivation for a cadre of anti-PRI organizers and voters to coalesce; and, for the first time since the 1940s, an opposition party was set to defeat the PRI in the 1988 presidential elections. In an impressive show of opposition growth and newfound strength, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas broke with the PRI and ran as the candidate for the left-leaning Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD). Evoking memories of his father, Lázaro Cárdenas (President from 1934-1940 and the first to put into action Revolutionary rhetoric), Cuauhtémoc promised to return the country to its Revolutionary ideals – democracy, equality, and most importantly, an end to corruption, corporatism, and cronyism. The young Cárdenas turned to domestic supporters, many of whom came from the post-earthquake social movements, rather than vying for the attention of foreign governments, organizations, and corporations which supported his rival – the rising star of the neoliberal technocrats – Carlos Salinas de Gortari (Joseph and Henderson 2002: 579).

Unwilling to leave the election to the electorate, however, the PRI manipulated the results: “On election night, the computerized vote tabulation system mysteriously crashed when Cárdenas appeared to have a 2 to 1 lead in voting. When the system came back on line the PRI’s Salinas de Gortari had mysteriously captured the lead” (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 105). The final, “official” results showed that Salinas had edged his opponents, winning fifty-one percent of the vote. The rise of the opposition, however, was unprecedented. Their success and near dethroning of the PRI would mark the beginning of the end of PRI dominance. And it had begun with the efforts of active citizens in post-earthquake 1985:

'85 was the start of the social participation of the citizens, the break with all the old mechanisms of control in the city; but its political expression was in '88. 1988 could not be explained without 1985: Cuauhtémoc [Cárdenas] may have been the new rallying point, but the people had known about a mechanism of autonomous participation at the margins of the PRI; they were not afraid of losing their corporative privileges because they'd already gained much outside of the PRI's auspices (Marco Rascón in Joseph and Henderson 2002: 589).

The “lost decade” was a political and economic nightmare for the PRI. It was also a nightmare for the vast majority of Mexicans living through it. As described above, decades of relative stability gave way to precariousness in all things – wages, food prices and availability, employment opportunities, education, healthcare, transportation, safety, and government. Largely overlooked in historical and political-economic analyses of the time, young people felt this instability acutely. How they experienced the “lost decade” is the subject of the following section.

#### Youth of the Lost Decade: *Los Chavos Banda*

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The political and economic crises of the 1980s together with the rise of civil society meant that people of diverse backgrounds were taking their destiny into their own hands rather than waiting for or relying on the government to address public problems, and young people did this as well. Carlos Monsiváis, famous critic and commentator on Mexican life, politics, and society, described the lost decade as a period of notorious lack of resources. But, he contended, young people resourcefully constructed the social, the artistic, and the communal from their very visceral experience of this lack and created symbolic systems which they used to make it through these difficult times (Monsiváis 1992: vii). Young people in Mexico had done this for decades, however. Indeed, youth who quietly expressed anti-government sentiment had existed on the geographic and metaphoric peripheries of Mexico since the *pachucos* made their way south, across the border from Los Angeles in the 1950s. In

the 1960s and 1970s, these efforts were taken up by the writers, poets, actors, and social commentators of the movement known as *la onda*, who also quietly agitated and expressed their discontent. By the 1980s, it was *los chavos banda* that took on this role (Feixa 1998).

*Los chavos banda* originated in the suburbs of Mexico City and left an indelible mark on Mexico, becoming the stand-in for all youth of the decade. The terms “*chavos banda*” and the more general “*la banda*” have become part of the lexicon when government officials discuss youth, when academics study them, or when they speak of and to one another. Originally, *los chavos banda* were associated with low-income barrios that often lacked public resources or were late in receiving them (such as running water, sewer, sanitation, paved roads, etc.) (Vallarino 2002). These areas were densely populated with working people who commuted daily into the city. Many of the inhabitants were first or second generation migrants from rural, agricultural areas. The young people of these areas had a particular way of dressing that became a marker of *los chavos banda*: jeans, leather jackets (or faux-leather), heavy work boots, and long hair.<sup>33</sup>

*La banda* were usually portrayed as drug-addicts and delinquents by the government and in the mass media and were the subject of much concern in these circles (Feixa 1998: 78). As noted in the previous chapter, young people had been a concern for the PRI since the late 1960s and early 1970s. The combination of the student protests in 1968 and 1971 and the Avándaro music festival later that year elicited fear in the government. Young people had demonstrated that they would not be quiet in the face of injustice or for the sake of the nation’s appearance to outsiders. Through Avándaro they had also shown that they could assemble, peaceably. But at Avándaro they enjoyed a popular cultural form (rock) whose style and provenance deeply irked the PRI because it flew in the face of the national identity

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<sup>33</sup> Journalist and social commentator José Agustín offers a useful account of *la banda* (Agustín 2004).

the government had worked so hard to create. Young people in Mexico were deemed suspect by the government and efforts to constrain and limit their personal and public expression are well documented (see chapter three). Suspicion of youth remained unchanged in the 1980s: “el ser jóven es para los ‘servidores de la ley’ un sinónimo de delincuente. Ser jóven es ser sospechoso de todo...” (“to be young is, for those in ‘the service of the law,’ synonymous with delinquent. To be young is to be suspect of everything...”) (Torres Medina 2002: 40). Musician Sergio Arau concurs, relaying that in the early 1980s, “todo el gobierno le seguía teniendo mucho, mucho miedo a los jóvenes” (“the whole government was still very, very afraid of young people”) (Arau 2010).

Media depictions of *los chavos banda* and the PRI’s fear of youth were in many ways off-base and exaggerated, as evidenced in Spanish anthropologist Carles Feixa’s ethnographic account. Writing about *la banda* of the mid to late 1980s, Feixa explains that rather than being a negative presence they became an active part of the community around the rock market and gathering place, El Chopo: “La banda, en suma, forma parte del paisaje habitual del barrio” (“*La banda*, in sum, forms a part of the daily landscape of the neighborhood”); they would occasionally collaborate with neighbors to organize parties or fix streets (ibid.: 79). Importantly, Feixa’s study points out characteristics of *la banda* that seemed antithetical to the popular media’s portrayal of them. He describes them as creating a community amongst themselves, a second family and, he notes that for them *la banda* is a model of sociability that organizes space and time in daily life. Rather than being the illiterate products of broken homes, Feixa explains that these young people did not have particularly contentious relationships with their families, stayed in school just like their contemporaries, were productive, working citizens who contributed to their households, and their primary activity was not delinquency. They were not only products of “la crisis” (felt especially

deeply in low income suburban zones) but also producers of cultural artifacts: modes of sociability, music, leisure spaces, slang, visual culture, tattoos, etc. Feixa goes on to argue that the contestation and anti-institutionalism associated with *la banda* was a costume that hid quite traditional cultural values: “Y eso es lo que hacen los chavos y chavas banda: teatralizar el cambio social, representar en la escena pública las contradicciones del México contemporáneo” (“And that it is what the *chavos* [male] and *chavas* [female] *banda* do: theatricalize social change, represent on the public stage the contradictions of contemporary Mexico”) (ibid).

Feixa’s perspectives were not widely shared, however, and in the 1980s in the eyes of the authorities, *la banda* became a euphemism for all youth and the negative things associated with them (rebellion, noise, disrespect for elders, disrespect for tradition, and a threat to the nation). Again, Monsiváis’ words serve well here:

La Banda – un estado de ánimo y una gana de divertirse con lo que hay – se vuelve un mito de la prensa y de organismos gubernamentales. Y los creyentes más enconados del mito son los funcionarios y los policías. Las tocadas se cancelan y las razias, que oficialmente no ocurren, se prodigan. Y así hasta el infinito (Monsiváis 1992: viii).

*La Banda* – a mood and a desire to enjoy oneself with whatever there is – becomes a myth of the press and governmental organizations. And the most fervent believers in the myth are the functionaries and the police. The concerts are cancelled and the raids, which officially don’t occur, proliferate. And on and on for infinity.

Simultaneously the term and its accompanying social stigma were taken up by young people themselves, who proudly wore the label and converted it into an emblem of identity (Feixa 1998: 101). Pitted against one another, *la banda* and the government dug in their heels.

Having a lot of young people together continued to scare the government and resulted in elaborate bureaucratic efforts to prevent large public gatherings of youth. Simply put, Mexico in the early 1980s was, “un país paternalista, donde los jóvenes no tienen acceso a espacios recreativos ni a lugares de ejercicio cultural propios” (“a paternalistic country, where

young people don't have access to recreational spaces nor to their own places for cultural expression") (Paredes Pacho 1992: 12). Opening cultural spaces where youth could gather was notoriously difficult with bureaucratic labyrinths, logistical nightmares, and excessive government fees preventing all but a handful of spaces from opening, and even these did not begin to emerge in any number until the second half of the decade (ibid. and personal interview 2010). Many musicians of this period recount the difficulty of finding places to play, though this absence of spaces for youth extended beyond musical expression.

The government's relationship with *la banda* and its music proved to be ambivalent, however. In the 1980s, the PRI periodically tapped into youth culture in order to harness its trends and the power of its numbers. Monsiváis suggests that while *la banda* had little in terms of resources, the PRI attempted to "seduce them" because they represented so many votes (Monsiváis 1992: vi). They did so by co-opting young people's common denominator – rock music; selectively lifting restrictions on rock concerts and mass gatherings of young people so as to advance their own agenda (Woodside Woods 2010: 88). As writer and musician José Luis Paredes Pacho explains, "por un lado, el gobierno hostiga y limita, censura y hasta reprime. Por el otro fomenta selectivamente [música rockera]" ("on one hand, the government harasses and limits, censors and even represses. On the other hand it selectively promotes [rock music]") (Paredes Pacho 1992: 137-138).

Slowly carving out public space for itself (sometimes through its own efforts, occasionally through self-interested government intervention), *la banda* became the focus of much attention: the creation of El Chopo (see prelude to this chapter) in 1980 was the first step in establishing a location primarily for the use of young people in search of diversion and social interaction. Another step took place in 1985 when the United Nations declared it the "year of youth" and Mexico responded by reactivating a governmental institution to

study and support young people. CREA, or the Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención a la Juventud (National Council of Resources for the Attention to Youth), attempted to cultivate a strong relationship with *los chavos banda*. (Woodside Woods 2010: 88). In addition, academics began investigating *los chavos banda* and brought attention (both good and bad) to the characteristics, habits, and daily life of young Mexicans. Finally, throughout the decade, mass media began considering youth taste in their programming, slowly creating space on radio and, by decade's end, television (the media are covered in more detail below).

This increased attention on young people effectively shed light on the centrality of music to their identity, particularly the importance of rock.<sup>34</sup> Monsiváis declares that for *los chavos banda* rock music was the most convenient explanation of the universe; with just a few songs, it was capable of resolving problems of identity and belonging (Monsiváis 1992: vii). Others claim rock “creates a place where difference is possible every day” (Aguilar et al. 1993: 9). Meanwhile, in her seminal work on youth culture and identity in Mexico, anthropologist Maritza Urteaga explains that rock music, along with dress and behavior, became the center of a collective youth movement (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998: 112). But what was this music all about – this music that unified a sea of young people in Mexico in the 1980s – while it also confused and challenged the government? The following section addresses this question.

### *Guacarock*: The Characteristics and Sounds of Early Homegrown Mexican Rock

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*Guacarock* characterizes the sound of Mexican rock music in the early 1980s. The term originated in a Botellita de Jerez song and has come to refer to much of the rock made

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<sup>34</sup> (See: Paredes Pacho 1992; Aguilar et al. 1993; Garay Sánchez 1993; Urteaga Castro Pozo 1995, 1998; Torres Medina 2002; Reguillo Cruz 2010b).

during the decade – a deliberate and proud blend of Mexican musical traditions and Anglo rock. Throughout their career, members of Botellita de Jerez have noted that rock was not born in Mexico, but *guacarock* was – it is urban and Mexican; it is a mix of Latin genres and sounds with Anglo rock; and it is all done without shame (Woodside Woods 2010: 89). The point is “hacer las cosas tal y como somos, así de sucios, como estamos.... Mostrar nuestro orgullo” (“to make things just as we are, just as dirty, as we are.... To demonstrate our pride”) (ibid.). Emerging from a decade of repression and censorship, musicians attempting to resurrect rock in the early 1980s played primarily in makeshift venues, with poor equipment and horrendous acoustics. Indeed, Botellita de Jerez leader, Sergio Arau, explains that the term *guacarock* arose precisely because of the terrible conditions where rock was played:

Porque era en lugares espantosos, acústicamente, y con malos instrumentos y mal equipo – entonces soñaba “aguacate”.... O sea, si es lo que tienes, es lo que es y punto. Entonces, de allí tomamos y montamos lo que es el guacarock (Arau 2010).

Because it was in dreadful places, acoustically, and with bad instruments and bad equipment – so it sounded like “avocado”.... In other words, if it’s what you have, it is what it is, the end. So from there we put together what is *guacarock*.

*Guacarock* sounds gritty, unsophisticated, often strident. The music features unpolished, usually amateur musicians struggling against their own instruments and sound equipment.

For Botellita de Jerez and other rock bands in Mexico in the early 1980s, theirs was an effort simply to be heard. In the first half of the 1980s they endeavored to do just that by playing in streets, open spaces, school gymnasiums, or tiny coffee shops and bars – places unaccustomed to the decibels put out by amplified guitars and drum kits. These venues were known as “hoyos funquis,” funky hole-in-the-wall spaces as ill equipped for musical performance as they were essential for the re-birth of Mexican rock. Arau recalls playing in abandoned parking lots, on the roofs of buildings, in a mechanic’s shop, and in gymnasiums:

Entonces el escenario, haz de cuenta, que era poquito más alto que [una persona]. Entonces tocabas con el techo aquí [en cima de la cabeza]. Si brincabas te partías la madre. Había nada más una puertita.... Entonces estaban selladas, o sea, paredes. Y luego salía una puertita... y adentro había 1,500 gentes. Así como sardines (ibid.).

So the stage is a little taller than [a person]. So you played with the ceiling [just above your head]. If you jumped, you were screwed. There was nothing more than a little door... So, the people were sealed in, corralled. And then there was a little door... and inside there were 1,500 people. Just like sardines.

As noted in the previous chapter, throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, Mexican rock music was repressed and censored by the Mexican government and media conglomerates that served as extensions of the ruling PRI party. As such, bands like Botellita de Jerez, Banda Bostik, Trolebús, El Tri, and Rockdrigo González (to name a few) creatively used unusual spaces to slowly build an audience for rock, introducing young people to the genre and distinguishing their music from the boleros, tropicalia, and mariachi – the adult music that dominated radio and television at the time (Camino 2010). Because the 1970s-era crackdown on rock included Anglo rock from the United States and United Kingdom, many young people were only marginally familiar with the genre, making the loosely organized, ad hoc street performances described by Arau essential to the re-birth of Mexican rock. In addition, fan-generated and -supported efforts like El Chopo provided much needed exposure and a hub where people could learn about rock music and trade albums that could only previously have been purchased through informal channels or outside of Mexico (Ríos Manzano 2005).

As important as it was for these rockers to create a place for themselves in the musical lives of young listeners, both sonically and physically, it was equally important for them to do so in Spanish. Botellita de Jerez member Armando Vega-Gil explains: “Uno de los grandes logros de Botellita fue hacer entender a la banda que era importante cantar en español para tener un interlocutor directo” (“One of the greatest achievements of Botellita was to make *la banda* understand that it was important to sing in Spanish in order to have a

direct interlocutor”) (Camino 2010: 56). Composing in Spanish broke the mold of Anglo rock and provided a means for these artists to communicate directly with their listeners in a way that was easily understood and relevant. As journalist and social commentator José Agustín remarks: “Evidentemente no iba a haber un verdadero rock nacional si no se componía en nuestro idioma” (“Evidently there wasn’t going to be true national rock if it wasn’t composed in our language”) (Agustín 2004: 112).

Still, there were divisions among rockers regarding what to do with rock in Mexico both in terms of sound and lyrical content. Some bands tapped into their creativity writing original, Spanish language rock that reinterpreted North American rock and rhythm and blues; El Tri was the leader and remains the example *par excellence* of this style of early 1980s rock (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998: 119). Other rockers of the time, most notably Rockdrigo González, combined the folksy, singer-songwriter style of Latin America’s *nueva canción* with US folk/country to create Mexico’s own version of protest rock, called *rock rupestre* (ibid.; see also López Flamarique 2010: 66-71). Still others took a playful musical and stylistic approach to the genre while very seriously and deliberately inserting “lo mexicano en el rock nativo” (“the Mexican into native rock”) (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998: 119). Botellita de Jerez led the way with songs glorifying the much maligned and often ignored urban poor and working classes – the original *chavos banda* described in the previous section (their albums “Lo naco es chido” and “La venganza del hijo de guacarock” are prime examples<sup>35</sup>). Though certainly a minority, some groups held tightly to the English-rock couplet; *los fusiles*, a holdover from the

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<sup>35</sup> “Naco is cool” (“naco” is a pejorative, meaning of low socioeconomic class, unsophisticated, with little education) and “The revenge of the son of Guacarock.”

1950s and 1960s, were rock songs that duplicated in their entirety Anglo rock. Ironically, in the case of *los fusiles*, bands' authenticity was predicated on their ability to copy<sup>36</sup> (ibid.: 118).<sup>37</sup>

It was musicians like El Tri, Botellita de Jerez, and Rockdrigo González, however, who had the greatest influence over the direction of Mexican rock in the early 1980s (Agustín 2004: 112). By fusing elements of traditional Mexican music with Anglo rock, these musicians utilized the malleability and adaptability present in rock music since it emerged as a marker of international youth culture in the 1950s to transform it into something uniquely Mexican, imbuing it with lyrical content and instrumentation that only made sense within its particular, local context. Anthropologist Maritza Urteaga Castro-Pozo explains the break these artists initiated:

Con la introducción de fragmentos de textos y sonidos mexicanos urbanos e indígena/urbanos, proponen romper con el estereotipo de rockero y de música rockera en esta ciudad, levantado por las generaciones del 68 y del setenta. Para estos últimos había que ser modernos, rupturar con el pasado, tener un *look* pesado y norteamericano, separarse de las culturas de origen o “levantarse” por encima de ellas. Mitos que empezaron a romperse, a cuestionarse, desde esta propuesta (ibid.: 120).

With the introduction of fragments of Mexican urban and indigenous/urban texts and sounds, they propose to break with the stereotype of the rocker and rock music in this city elevated by the generation of '68 and '70. For those generations it was necessary to be modern, to break with the past, to have a heavy, North American look, to separate themselves from their roots and 'rise above' them. These myths began to be broken, questioned via this [new] proposal.

Far from being simply a musical movement, Mexican rock of the early 1980s joined young people (*los chavos banda*) in a cultural project that demanded space for young people and their popular cultural forms, rejected modernization projects that assumed the superiority of all

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<sup>36</sup> Since very few people had access to original Anglo rock, authenticity here is as dependent on the *perception* of faithfulness to the original as it is on technical accuracy of the reproduction.

<sup>37</sup> The bands that emerged at this time but did not receive mass media or major record label attention once again retreated (or were pushed) to the margins. This rock became known as “rock urbano” and has grown in popularity and even prospered since the 1980s, but remains sidelined and receives little commercial attention (personal correspondence 2012). It is an important facet of Mexico's rock music scene but, because of its lack of mediated attention, remains outside of the scope of this project.

things North American, and recognized the value of Mexico's indigenous roots (confirmed in personal interviews 2010-2011; see also Torres Medina 2002: 146).

By mid-decade, and following the turmoil of Mexico's devastating earthquake, other bands joined the early 1980s pioneers, mentioned above. These artists took up the banner of their predecessors by singing in Spanish and fusing Latin rhythms with classic, Anglo rock. Emerging, from the rubble of the earthquake, *Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio* (Damned Neighborhood and The Kids from the 5<sup>th</sup> Patio) formed in 1985. Two years later, 1987, saw the formation of *Caifanes*, a band that would become legendary in the following decades. In 1989, two more groundbreaking bands formed, *Santa Sabina* and *Café Tacuba*. Together, these bands would attract the attention of the mass media, further expand the Mexican rock music scene, and – as will be described in chapter five – lead Mexico's rock music explosion of the 1990s. Before moving on to that period, the next section examines the relationship between the mass media and *rock ochentero* (eighties rock).

### Rockin' the Radio: Creating Space in the Mass Media

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While rock was centrally important in youth identity formation during this period, in the first few years of the 1980s it was rarely heard on the radio, virtually absent from large concert venues, invisible on television, scarcely mentioned in newspapers, and poorly promoted and distributed by record companies. Radio programmer Heriberto Vázquez notes that radio stations, “No se tocaba nada de rock en español, y menos mexicano” (“They didn't play any Spanish language rock, and even less Mexican [rock]”) (quoted in Camino 2010: 55). Vázquez attributes this to tremendous fear on the part of radio stations because of what happened after *Avándaro*: During the *Avándaro* music festival in 1971, Radio Juventud (Youth Radio) transmitted the performances live, but because the word marijuana was

mentioned on air, the station's DJs lost their licenses and the station itself was stripped of its transmission permits. "A partir de ahí, por el miedo de los concesionarios, se prohibió tocar rock en español" ("From that time on, because the distributors were scared, it was prohibited to play *rock en español*") (ibid.). Radio stations were forced to bow to the rules of the government and did not play Spanish language rock or Mexican rock. They did play some English language rock from the US and UK, but disco dominated youth-oriented radio stations through the late 1970s and early 1980s (Interferencia 7Diez 2009).

The burgeoning Mexican rock music scene taking place at the street level, an awakened civil society, a languishing PRI, and increased focus on Mexico's youth attracted the attention of the music industry (more on this below). Additionally, the PRI's monolithic control of the mass media began to wane as its legitimacy was undermined by countless political and economic imbroglios (Hernández and McAnany 2001). Still, radio licensing regulations and communication law stipulated that a certain amount of radio content had to be Mexican in origin and maintained that communication technologies were to serve the national interest (Hayes 2000; Woodside Woods 2010: 94). Together, these factors prompted radio to expand its offerings in order to reach a larger portion of the youth market. In 1981, the station, Rock Stereo, began playing heavy metal and pop-rock from the US, as well as a dash of *rock mexicano*.

By the second half of the decade, more stations emerged, like Rock 101 with its program "Pure and Absolute Rock," which not only played commercially successful foreign rock, but differentiated itself by being the principle driving force in the media for bands like Botellita de Jerez, Maldita Vecindad, Caifanes, Cafe Tacuba, and many more (ibid.: 46). Rock 101 was especially important to the national rock music scene because it expanded the scene to include English language rock that was not otherwise well known (The Cure, The Police,

Depeche Mode, The Smiths), as well as Spanish language rock from Spain and Argentina (Agustín 2004: 114). Beginning in 1987, Rock 101's AM sister station, Espacio 59, took Rock 101's diverse programming to the AM side of the dial, providing an additional option for Mexico City rockers. Luis Gerardo Salas, head of programming for these stations, "consideró que el rock, además de haber sido olvidado por el radio, era una cultura amplia que había tenido una influencia notable en el arte y la sociedad desde la segunda mitad del siglo XX" ("considered rock, in addition to being forgotten by radio, to be a wide culture that had had a notable influence on art and society since the second half of the twentieth century") (quoted in Torres Medina 2002: 175). The growing radio presence of both English and Spanish language rock would, by the end of the decade, extend to television with Mexican TV stations inviting both local and foreign bands to their sets (see chapter five).

While radio exposed young people to an ever-widening spectrum of both national and international rock – helping to establish *rock mexicano* as distinct with an identity and sound all its own – it was the interest of record companies that allowed the genre to establish a foothold. Independent Mexican labels ComRock (which produced albums for El Tri, Kenny y los Eléctricos, and Luzbel) and Denver Records (which produced El Harragán and Banda Bostik) were joined by German label Ariola and led the way for the Mexican rock explosion that occurred in the 1990s (see Woodside Woods 2010; *Nuestro Rock* 2001; Garay Sánchez 1993; Roura 1985). Ariola, a subsidiary of BMG, was especially important, coining the term "*rock en tu idioma*" ("rock in your language") and launching an international campaign that signed and distributed Spanish language rock bands from Spain, Argentina, and Mexico (Woodside Woods 2010; Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998).<sup>38</sup> Ariola and its campaign successfully launched the careers of some of the bands that would become synonymous with

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<sup>38</sup> Agustín attributes the term to Mexican television giant, Televisa (Agustín 2004: 115).

Mexican rock, specifically, and *rock en español*, generally – Caifanes, Santa Sabina, Maldita Vecindad, and La Lupita (Woodside Woods 2010: 93).

## Conclusion

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This chapter has explained how economic crises and years of government repression led to the creation of Mexico's *guacarock*, a popular culture form that in its earliest days was created by and directed toward poor and working class youth, *los chavos banda*. The *guacarock* born primarily in Mexico's barrios was at its heart social commentary offered by those at the margins. Its greatest challenge and most important accomplishment from 1980 through 1988 was its ability to carve out space for itself within Mexican culture while also re-defining what it meant to be young after a long period of government oppression. In the streets and in other unconventional spaces, homegrown Mexican rock declared itself, began generating attention, and garnering a significant following. In his poetic prose, rock musician Saúl Hernández, lead singer of Mexican goth-rock band Caifanes, explains how the repression of the 1970s and the turmoil of the early 1980s provoked a simple, yet profound struggle for survival:

It was the seventies, an era that changed our destiny. A time of intolerance and repression. The abuse of power threw us into an abyss from which many of us would never be able to emerge. We found refuge there, a unique corner where it was just ourselves and our loneliness. A space forgotten by society and protected by angels. It taught us that marginalization has its own powerful side, covered with light, possessing what the other side lacks: dignity. That smelly gutter would be our home, and repression our mentor. It was there that survival developed its own world, an intimate language, a heartrending scream that fought for the right to exist (Hernández 2006: vii).

From the “gutter” and reeling from years of forced silence came Spanish language rock icons that not only changed Mexican rock music, but through their music offered a means for youth expression that was at once familiar and revolutionary.

Paradoxically, this struggle had a periodic yet crucial ally in the PRI government. The PRI, which served as a behemoth against which early Mexican rock positioned itself, can also take some credit for rock's success during this period. The PRI effectively sanctioned rock music by utilizing rock for its own political purposes, harnessing it in rallies to attract the attention of young voters. Additionally, though this was not the intended purpose, legislating that radio stations play Mexican content, provided an avenue for enterprising radio programmers to include homegrown, Mexican rock.

Unanticipated consequences of the PRI's slow demise, however, were likely more influential in the rise of Mexican rock in the early to mid-1980s. As El Chopo grew in popularity as a gathering place, market, and center for Mexico's rock scene, as well as its counterculture, the weakened government continued to look the other way and the *tianguis* grew in import. The PRI's loss of direct control over the media, particularly the radio, during this period further loosened the reins on radio programmers who chose to play the *rock nacional* for which its young listeners were clamoring. Facing threats from rivals such as the left-leaning Cárdenas and the PRD while also encountering an increasingly active civil sphere demanding democratic rule, the PRI had little choice but to leave the burgeoning Mexican rock scene alone or have to deal with more charges of authoritarianism. As musician and writer José Luis Paredes Pachó explains:

Porque el rock mexicano y todas las manifestaciones culturales independientes, "no alineadas" a grupos de poder, ni a clientelismos políticos, no pueden [continuar a] desarrollarse sin una verdadera apertura democrática, sin un desarrollo al parejo de la sociedad civil que dé libre cauce a las dinámicas de ejercicio cultural independiente (Paredes Pachó 1992: 137).

Because Mexican rock and all independent cultural manifestations "not aligned" to powerful groups, nor to political clientelism, can't [continue to] develop themselves without a truly open democracy, without the development of a fair civil society that gives free reign to independent cultural exercise.

It was with this spirit that Mexican rock entered its next stage, the hugely successful boom time of *rock en español*, which is the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter V

### The Consolidation of Mexican Rock: Identity and the Boom (1988-1997)

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#### Prelude: El Multiforo Alicia

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“Cualquier persona que hable de rock en México debe hablar de El Alicia (López Flamarique 2010).”

“Anyone who talks about rock in Mexico must talk about El Alicia.”

“Unos metros robados a la lógica neoliberalista, al control social-political (ibid.).”

“A few square meters stolen away from the logic of neoliberalism, from socio-political control.”

*Centrally located in the Roma Norte colonia (neighborhood) of Mexico City, El Alicia, as it is commonly known, is a tiny music venue plunked down in the middle of a city block, across from a park, neighbor to an Internet café, a restaurant, a bar, and a convenience store. During the day and from the outside, El Alicia blends into its surroundings. Its corrugated, garage-style metal door (commonplace in Mexico City) slides into place and reveals nothing of the energy, excitement, and anticipation that are contained within once night falls and a band prepares to play. Often, anticipation grows even before the large metal door rises, as rock music fans gather outside and begin to line up for admittance to the now legendary venue. Drawn by the affordable ticket prices, cheap beer, friendly and recognizable staff, Mexico’s rock music fans come to El Alicia because it is one of the few places in Mexico City where you can consistently hear up and coming rock music. While many of the bands that play there are local or regional favorites, the venue attracts artists from all over Mexico, as well as the occasional international rock superstar (Manu Chao played there in 2006) (López Flamarique 2010: 97).*

*It is El Alicia’s status at the center of the rock music scene in Mexico City since 1995 that brings well-known artists to its stage. As famous French/Spanish rocker Manu Chao explains:*

*Un lugar como El Alicia es súper importante culturalmente. Estos espacios tienen que multiplicarse; no sobrevivir sino multiplicarse, y por ahora solo están sobreviviendo. Entonces es responsabilidad de todos: del público, de venir; de las bandas nuevas, de tocar ahí; y de las bandas famosas que vienen de ahí, de no olvidarse de dónde salieron (in López Flamarique 2010: 97).*

*A place like El Alicia is super important culturally. There need to be more of these places; they don’t need to just survive, there need to be more of them, and right now they are just surviving. So it is everyone’s responsibility: for the public, to come; for the new bands, to play there; and for the famous bands that got their start there, to not forget where they came from.*

*There is nothing fancy, sophisticated, or comfortable about performing or attending shows at El Alicia. The well-lit, brightly painted, poster-covered entry is welcoming and spacious enough for fans to come in – single-file, approximately twenty at a time – and to reach the ticket counter. Tickets are purchased and a few feet away male rockeros are patted-down, cigarettes are set on a shelf (to be re-claimed during a break in the show or afterward) and bottles or pocketknives are confiscated. From this point forward, the scene changes markedly. An unpredictably curving, black metal staircase rises through a narrow shaft whose accompanying black walls create a liminal space for concertgoers as they ascend into the heart of El Alicia.*

*This is a rectangular, concrete-walled room with enough space to accommodate about 400 people. There are no windows and no visible doors. Bathrooms are tucked into a back corner, a small bar with neon beer signs is in the corner diagonally opposite the bathrooms and at stage-left. The stage itself is as diminutive as the space; raised about two and a half feet off the ground, a five-piece band fills it. Along the very top of one wall are small slats that open to the outside world and provide ventilation. The walls themselves are marked by colorful murals portraying some of El Alicia’s character. In one mural, Mexican 1930s and ‘40s cultural icon, singer, actor, and comedian, Tin Tan, is depicted – cigar clamped*



**Figure 1- Wall mural at El Alicia. Photo by author.**

*firmly between his teeth – alongside the mischievously smiling Cheshire cat (of Alice in Wonderland fame) that serves as a symbol for the venue (Figure 1). The psychedelic painting also includes a reveling skeleton (popular in Mexican folk art) and demented versions of an eagle and a serpent (two figures prominently featured on the Mexican flag).*

*Once the room fills, however, all of these images are obscured. Bodies – with their sweat, smells, and heat – pack together, squeezed into intimacy. With faces turned toward the stage, everyone wishes they had a beer in hand if for no other reason than the temporary relief an ice-cold bottle can provide. When a popular band is playing, El Alicia fills beyond any reasonable capacity. So many fans turn out that those who run El Alicia try to let as many people in as possible, while many more wait outside simply hoping there might be an encore performance later in the night. Once a band starts to play, those lucky (and early) enough to get in experience an unavoidable and bizarre group-dance, propelled by proximity and laws of motion. Bodies jostle up and down, side to side and necessarily come in contact with those beside them. Accumulated moisture from these bodies at work/play collects on the ceiling and drips down as unconventional rain. If you are inside, you are covered with sweat; the scant ventilation completely incapable of helping a crowd breathe.*

*But this is precisely why you go. In discussion with the author, one concertgoer relates: “Puedes desmadrar todo. Porque vas a eso. Hasta te sales bien, bien feliz. Todo desahogado. Gritaste mucho” (“You go totally crazy. That’s why you go. You even leave really, really happy. All unburdened. You yelled a lot”) (personal interview 2010). The verb “desahogarse” means to unburden oneself, to blow off steam, to give vent to. Concertgoers leave such experiences liberated, elated, lighter than when they arrived. Stepping out of the venue and onto the sidewalk after a show, one observes that smiles are broad, eyes are bleary, and bodies are exhausted. The shows at El Alicia start and end early, an acknowledgement of the fact that Mexico City is a megalopolis, it is huge, and many rockeros come from far away and have far to go after the show ends. Centrally located between Metro stops on two different lines, as well as countless bus routes (including the Insurgentes MetroBus line that traverses much of city from north to south), concertgoers fan out in all directions as they make their way home or to the next event on the evening’s agenda.*

## Introduction

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The previous chapter described the political, economic, and social context from which homegrown Mexican rock music emerged, from 1980 to 1988. This chapter continues the exploration of Mexico's *rock nacional* and its relationship with the state, civil society, and the media by examining the period of the genre's greatest success, 1988 through 1997. The chapter begins with a discussion of the political, economic, and social landscapes of the time, briefly describing both the Salinas and Zedillo presidential periods, as well as Mexico's growing civil sphere. How young people experienced this period is examined in the following section. The chapter then turns to the rock music that accompanied young people at the time, describing its characteristics, innovations, and some of its most salient contributions. Finally, the role of the mass media – radio, television, and the music industry – is discussed with an eye toward how the media contributed to *rock en español's* tremendous success. The chapter's conclusion focuses on how all of these elements, while often in tension or even direct opposition, are intimately connected.

## Busts, Booms, Transitions: Mexico's Political, Economic, and Social Landscapes

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The economic and political pendulum swings that characterized the first part of the 1980s continued through the end of the decade and into the mid-1990s. While the latter period was considerably more stable, the perception of stability was greater than actual stability. As will be explained below, at the end of 1994, the government was forced to devalue the currency sending Mexico into yet another painful economic crisis. The two presidential terms, or *sexenios*, described below were markedly different in terms of each man's personality. Nevertheless, each of these presidents was keen on internationalization, privatization, and neoliberal economic strategies. As will be shown, the political, economic,

and social pushes and pulls that occurred during this period contributed to an increasingly open and democratic society, which greatly benefited opposition groups, civil society, and youth expression. These developments would prove to be integral to rock music's success from 1988 through 1997.

Mexico's economic free-fall of the 1980s was swiftly arrested by its new President, the young, charismatic, technocrat, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Harvard educated and brought up in an influential and privileged *priista* family, Salinas became President under dubious circumstances (see previous chapter). It was startling clear that the PRI machine had manipulated the results of the 1988 presidential election and Salinas would need to do something to convince the public to remain complicit in PRI domination. He did so, with flair. *New York Times* journalists Preston and Dillon note, "Although Salinas shared most of the free-market economic views of his predecessor... his political persona was radically different.... Salinas made himself into a full-bore caudillo. He restored the presidency to the original monarchical grandeur conceived by the founders of the PRI system" (Preston and Dillon 2004: 181). Salinas' approach was Janus-like (in fact his cabinet is referred to as the "Janus cabinet"). He embraced modern economic development in the form of neoliberal policies, privatization, openness to international markets and free trade, deregulation, and the end of government protectionism and subsidization. Simultaneously, Salinas reinforced PRI traditions, centralizing government and seeking to control the entire country from the presidential office. His economic reforms were radical but this reformist sensibility did not extend to politics, "preferring instead to retain power in the hands of the presidency" (Camp 2003: 3).

For much of Salinas' *sexenio* (six-year presidential term), his efforts to modernize Mexico's economy were successful: Outside observers pointed to Mexico as a model for

economic liberalization of a “Third World” country (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009); capital investment increased, inflation was reduced from 52% to 8% between 1988 and 1993, and dollar reserves increased (Camp 2003: 249). Additionally, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed, which promised to thrust Mexico into the illustrious company “of first world countries with robust and diverse market-driven economies and high standards of living” (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 106). Many of these reforms, while beneficial for wealthy Mexicans, were devastating for the poor and working classes (ibid.). For example, Salinas’ undoing of the government-regulated *ejido* system of land rights, which dated back to the 1910 Mexican Revolution, effectively privatized and internationalized agriculture, leading to increased food exports to the United States, but less and more expensive food for national consumption (Adler Hellman 1999).

The gleaming image of Mexico and of Salinas on the international stage was dramatically tarnished on January 1, 1994 when the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) rose up to declare war against the Mexican state. January 1 was also the day NAFTA went into effect and the Zapatistas strategically emerged that day so as to point out the deep contradictions between government attention focused on international trade and government inattention to the plight of rural, agrarian, and indigenous people *inside* Mexico. Salinas and the PRI would be further damaged a few months later when Salinas’ handpicked successor, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated at a campaign event in Tijuana. Though the gunman was later deemed to have acted alone, it was widely believed that the PRI’s weakening grip on political control exacerbated by bitter and divisive infighting was to blame for the shocking and unprecedented event (Preston and Dillon 2004). In spite of the PRI’s foibles, the apparently strong economy and disjointed efforts by

the opposition allowed PRI outsider Ernesto Zedillo to win the presidential election relatively easily in August 1994.

Zedillo's *sexenio* got off to devastating start, however. Days after taking office, Zedillo was forced to devalue the peso, and “as a result Mexicans who held their savings in the national currency lost nearly half of their savings at the same time they saw their outstanding debt increase exponentially” (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 108). The government was “totally unprepared” for what followed, i.e., “an almost unbelievable chain of economic blunders, which culminated in the emergency financial intervention of the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. government. Mexico lost its sovereignty in economic policy making” (Olvera 2004: 420 fn. 35). Zedillo managed to wrangle the economy and limit the devastation to 1995. What he could not do was save a divided PRI that often found itself opposed to factions within its own party and to Zedillo himself. The fact that the preceding Salinas administration had “fully understood the nature and consequences of the impending economic crisis, but allowed it to worsen rather than assuming responsibility [for it]” is what really stung and alienated the Mexican people (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 108).

After a challenging start, Zedillo, a Yale educated economist, stabilized the country in many ways by providing leadership through difficult financial times, encouraging electoral reform, permitting an increasingly free press, and quietly refusing to demure to the demands of the old-guard PRI. A series of political reforms that had begun in the 1970s, together with a PRI divided against itself, led to a dramatic political shift during the midterm elections of 1997. For the first time, the mayor of Mexico City (traditionally a presidential cabinet appointment) was elected in an open electoral process. Former presidential candidate and left-leaning PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas won the post, and control of the political

and economic center of the country was wrested from the PRI's hands. An unusually high number of voters voted in the elections and opposition parties won a majority in the Chamber of Deputies (Mexico's equivalent of the US Congress) for the first time since the birth of the PRI (Camp 2003: 196; Olvera 2004: 420).

After decades of slow, plodding, almost imperceptible electoral reform, the midterm elections of 1997 were a watershed moment. The PRI had always led and maintained control through careful, pervasive manipulation that was top-down and centralized. Its efforts were counteracted, however, by the spark of civil disobedience during the student protests in 1968 and 1971, a renewed civil society in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake, and the many new popular organizations that emerged in the 1990s. Social scientist Alberto J. Olvera describes how through mass demonstrations and by attracting media attention, movements of the 1990s like the Zapatistas (EZLN), El Barzón (a debtors relief movement), and Civic Alliance (a pro-democracy movement), together with a burgeoning NGO sector fostered increased civic participation. Additionally, Olvera writes: "These movements offered telling criticisms of the established regime. Not only did they point out the contradiction between legitimacy and legality, but they also broke the regime's moral and practical monopoly over social policy" (Olvera 2004: 435). Close electoral oversight by domestic civic associations as well as international observers ensured that the 1997 elections were the nation's first free and fair elections in modern times.<sup>39</sup>

These developments in the civil sphere accompanied an economic boom, bust, and period of stabilization. As one would expect, these social, political, and economic transitions

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<sup>39</sup> Olvera notes that Mexico's civil society is still weak. Nevertheless, the transformations that took place in the 1990s cannot be underestimated in terms of their contribution to the successful transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN in the 2000 presidential elections and also provide evidence of significant growth and progress for this social sector (Olvera 2004).

impacted young people. How the Salinas and Zedillo administrations as well as increasingly visible social movements influenced youth and youth culture is the topic of the next section.

### Searching for Identity: The Multiple and Varied *Culturas Juveniles*

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Salinas' drive to internationalize Mexico and turn it into a formidable player on the international stage through incorporation into NAFTA was followed by heavy-handed international involvement in the Mexican economy by the World Bank and the IMF. At the same time, citizens mobilized efforts to improve the common good, locally. Youth were part of these processes – one outward-looking, the other internally focused – influencing them while also being influenced by them. Social scientist Rossana Reguillo describes the emergence of “culturas juveniles” (youth cultures) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, noting that these heterogeneous groups were no longer limited by local loyalties and experiences, but rather were aware of the globalization of identity (Reguillo Cruz 2010a). That is, youth's experiences mirrored those of the nation: the intense inward-looking tendencies of the government during the early to mid-1980s gave way and Mexican youth gradually shifted their attention to global trends, mixing them with local realities in their search for identity and in the production of youth culture.

This can be seen in characterizations of youth by Mexican anthropologists and sociologists during this period (late 1980s – 1990s). While the *chavos banda* described in the previous chapter dominated descriptions of Mexican youth in the early to mid-1980s, characterizations became more nuanced over time. By the late 1980s, researchers also identified *los juniors* – the children of wealthy, powerful business owners and politicians; *los yupies* – yuppies, who, like *los juniors* were wealthy, but were “más limpios, más bonitos” (“cleaner, prettier”) (Torres Medina 2002: 40); *los nuevos pobres* (the new poor) – this self-

styled term referred to youth who disguised their wealth and distanced themselves from *los juniors* and *los yuppies* by dressing like *chavos banda* and denying their upper-class privilege; *los clasemedieros* were middle class youth without the social capital of their wealthier peers, but who were well-educated, technologically savvy, and closely followed trends coming out of the United States and Europe. But, according to Torres Medina, “este sector social no conoce de raíces históricas y no tiene memoria política” (“this social sector doesn’t know its historical roots and doesn’t have political memory”) (Torres Medina 2002: 41). This fine level of differentiation belies the fact that Mexico’s economic situation in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s left the vast majority of young people with few economic and political resources: jobs were scarce, opportunity for higher education was limited, and possibilities for upward mobility and advancement were few (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998).

Amid the economic ups and downs of this period, youth became increasingly active in the growing social movements described in the previous section. Young people during the late 1980s and 1990s “sea por moda o convicción... creen vivir un Woodstock político en la jungla de concreto y se adhieran a actividades encauzadas a salvar la ecología, la democracia, el amor o la paz” (“whether it’s because of trends or conviction... think they live a political Woodstock in a concrete jungle and embrace activities channeled toward saving the environment, democracy, love or peace”) (Torres Medina 2002: 29). The rise of the Zapatista movement on behalf of the indigenous people of Chiapas became a major rallying point for youth during the mid-1990s with many young people helping to organize benefit concerts, writing self-produced publications addressing the plight of native peoples, and becoming politically active on behalf of related causes or like-minded politicians. El Multiforo Alicia, described in the prelude to this chapter, is an example of the kind of place where youth could gather to discuss the situation in Chiapas and work, collectively, for

change. In addition, as a “centro cultural” (cultural center), El Alicia held workshops, small conferences, and meetings to address issues such as AIDS, human rights, and government repression of youth. Part of El Alicia’s efforts included the use of posters, which were produced cheaply, in massive quantities, and distributed throughout the city (see Figures 2 and 3) (López Flamarique 2010).<sup>40</sup>

Figure 2 – We are rebel dignity. Photo by author at El Alicia



Figure 3 – Imagine: Make love; Use a condom. Source: El Alicia



But while some youth became more active in civil society and while researchers were increasingly keen to differentiate between youth groups, life for adolescents and young adults remained as precarious and uncertain as it was in the early to mid-1980s (see chapter four).

Torres Medina explains:

El común denominador de muchos jóvenes agrupados en bandas no es el construir opciones reales para mejorar sus oportunidades y calidad de vida, sino que, a falta de expectativas y de un trato social adverso, se ven inmersos en la marginación y la violencia (Torres Medina 2002: 28).

The common denominator for many young people grouped together in gangs<sup>41</sup> is not to construct real options to improve their possibilities and quality of life, but rather, because of a lack of expectations and adverse social treatment, they find themselves immersed in marginalization and violence.

<sup>40</sup> El Alicia has engaged in these kinds of activities since it opened in 1995 and continues to do so today.

<sup>41</sup> The translation of “bandas” to “gangs” while technically correct is imprecise and does not convey the proper meaning for this usage. Here the meaning is closer to “groups” or perhaps even “subcultures.”

Significantly, youth expression around social and political issues from the late 1980s through the 1990s was centered around rock music. As will be explored in the following section, there was a sense of restlessness and anxiety on the part of young people that played itself out in a search for identity that was richly articulated in the popular rock music of the time.

### *Rock en Español: The Boom of Mexican Rock*

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The movement that would become known as “rock en español” exploded in popularity in Mexico in 1988 with the release of Caifanes’ “La Negra Tomasa.” The song, a goth-rock cover of a traditional Cuban cumbia, sold over half a million copies, “more than any other Mexican single in the thirty-year history of *rocanrol*” (Martínez 1992: 161). As one interviewee emphatically put it:

“La Negra Tomasa” vino a romper esquemas. O sea, innovar. Nunca habíamos escuchado en la radio una cumbia rockera – *nunca!* ¿Tu crees que no fue un boom hasta político? ¿Como ver la clase burguesa cantando esas canciones? (personal interview 2011).

“La Negra Tomasa” came and broke down barriers. That is, to innovate. We had never heard a rock cumbia on the radio – *never!* Do you think that it wasn’t a boom, even a political one? To see the bourgeoisie singing those songs?

With the songs’ success, Caifanes achieved tremendous airplay for other songs off of their 1987 eponymous debut album. The growing popularity of Spanish language rock from Spain and Argentina added fuel to the fire. In the lead up to Caifanes’ number one hit, in 1986, a conference designed to promote and give life to Spanish language rock in Latin America was held in Madrid, Spain; meanwhile the record label Ariola organized a meeting on what they called “rock en tu idioma” (a precursor to “rock en español”) (Torres Medina 2002: 147).

Because Mexican telecommunication law dictated that a certain portion of airtime be devoted to national content (Woodside Woods 2010: 94) radio programmers eager to play the *rock en español* hits emerging from Spain and South America, increasingly turned to

Mexican rock as well (personal interview 2010).<sup>42</sup> Soon it would dominate youth-oriented radio throughout Mexico.

The music that emerged in the late 1980s and grew in popularity throughout the 1990s was different from the *guacarock* discussed in the previous chapter because it was professionally produced, drew from increasingly diverse musical influences, distanced itself from guitar-heavy rhythm and blues, and contained more sophisticated lyrics. But Mexico's *rock en español* maintained *guacarock*'s explicitly Mexican sensibilities – singing in Spanish and chronicling life in Mexico. As journalist Ernesto Lechner describes it: “Sure, the sounds of rock, punk, hip-hop, and electronica were present in their work, but there was also the refreshing appearance of a new element. These musicians had grown up listening to their parents’ record collection of Latin American popular music: boleros, bossa nova, salsa, cumbias, and syrupy Latin pop” (Lechner 2006: x). Importantly, these artists knew where rock came from but claimed it as their own, imbuing it with rhythms, instrumentation, narratives, and accompanying fashions that made *rock en español* a genre unto itself. Maldita Vecindad lead singer, Roco, declared: “It might be true that rock began in the North, but now it’s all ours” (quoted in Martínez 1992: 149).

The work that rock and its followers had done in the early 1980s laid the foundation for the *rock en español* explosion. The previous generation had carved out space for rock both physically and in the media – *rock en español* musicians and fans filled the spaces to capacity, demanded more, and finally knocked down (most of) the obstacles erected by the PRI against the genre, mass concerts, and collective youth activity. By 1989, a national music award was established to recognize rock (Torres Medina 2002: 148); by 1990, Radio 101, a youth and rock-oriented radio station, had sponsored a number of massive rock concerts; by

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<sup>42</sup> Mexican rock's relationship with radio, television, and the music industry is discussed in more detail below.

1992, researchers began exploring *rock contestataria* (contestatory rock); in 1993, Caifanes performed at the Palacio de los Deportes (an indoor arena built for the 1968 Olympics and an important national landmark); and in 1995 a rock music festival was held at the national university's Ciudad Universitaria – 30,000 people attended (Torres Medina 2002).

These tremendous steps forward had taken place extremely quickly, however. Rock had largely been silenced in Mexico from the late sixties to the early eighties;<sup>43</sup> *rock en español*'s sudden and swift growth in popularity did not immunize it from political and social backlash. For many adults and parents, rock was considered the devil's music. Because rock was satanized it was often difficult for young people to access rock *with* their parent's permission (personal interviews 2010). When mass concerts took place, the police were present and made their authority felt (Torres Medina 2002: 156). At a 1995 Caifanes concert, one fan described how teenage girls eager to have their photo taken with the band were assaulted by police, “viene la represión de los policías porque se querían subir dos o tres chicas y las empezaron a golpear” (“police repression comes because two or three girls want to go up [on stage] and the police started to hit them”) (in Torres Medina 2002: 40).<sup>44</sup> Because of what was perceived as delinquent behavior at this and a few other concerts, the PRI continued to monitor mass gatherings of youth carefully (ibid.: 156). Therefore, despite increased openness on the part of the PRI toward rock and youth, police violence against youth and satanization of rock in the media kept *rock en español* somewhat marginalized; young people remained suspect in the eyes of authorities.

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<sup>43</sup> In spite of the fact that rock was rarely featured in the mass media, it had existed underground throughout the 1970s and its popularity grew in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was, therefore, not *unknown* (personal correspondence 2012).

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that it is *very* common for fans (especially female fans) to go up on stage with band members – the author has seen this with even the most famous groups. In the mid-1990s it was conceivably even *less* problematic, thus underscoring the disproportionate police response described by this young man in 1995.

In contrast with homegrown Mexican rock's early days (see chapter four) the tense relationship between rock, youth, and the PRI during this period was chronicled overtly in the music. The following subsections explore how three of Mexican *rock en español's* most influential and best-selling groups dealt explicitly and directly with the political and economic situation of the time, articulating everyday experiences in understandable and relatable ways that resonated with people throughout the country. The first two groups, Maldita Vecindad and Café Tacuba, are members of what one radio programmer referred to as the "Holy Trinity" of Mexican rock music (personal interview 2010). In interviews with fans and music industry professionals, the third group, Molotov, is the most often cited example of popular, political Mexican rock (personal interviews 2010-2011). Together, these groups helped popularize the genre and, though stylistically quite different, each proudly sang in Spanish, blended regional and local musical traditions in their versions of rock, discussed issues of national import in song, and articulated a modern form of *mexicanidad*, or Mexicanness, that differed from that which had been spoon-fed to Mexicans via the PRI and PRI-controlled media since the 1940s. Their outspoken critiques of power and the powerful extended to the media, making their own presence in the media both paradoxical and intriguing.

#### *Maldita Vecindad's El Circo - 1991*

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In 1991, Maldita Vecindad y Los Hijos del 5° Patio released *El Circo (The Circus)*, the band's second album. It became the best-selling album in the history of Mexican rock (Rulo 2011a). The English language music magazine *SPIN* deemed it one of the best albums of the 1990s and it was the only non-English language album on the list (ibid.). The album tells stories of daily life in Mexico City, but its songs resonated throughout the country. Instead of giving airtime to the first single released by the record label, each major market in Mexico

gravitated toward its own favorite (ibid.), demonstrating the remarkable breadth of experience chronicled on the album, as well as the band's unprecedented ability to speak to a regionally divided and incredibly diverse nation.

At the time of *El Circo's* release Maldita Vecindad was not famous like Caifanes or pop-rock icons, Fobia. Their following was small but loyal. *El Circo* changed that, but it took more than a year for it to get much traction in the media – in some cases DJs were nervous to even say the band's name on air (which translates to “Damned Neighborhood”) (ibid.). But the album was wild, irreverent, festive, direct, and expressed sentiments that people throughout the country could relate to. On the song “Un Gran Circo” (“A Great Circus”) the band points out the pain of living with so much poverty that young people are forced to work as clowns and fire jugglers on street corners. The song's lyrics are simple, poignant, and expressive of the tone of the album. The music on the other hand is exciting, animated, almost peppy with its ska beat and heavy use of horns. At the end of the first verse, the singer invites the listener “to our city” and then describes:

En una esquina es muy fácil  
que tu puedas ver  
a un niño que trabaja  
y finge sonreír  
lanzando pelotas  
par' vivir  
solo es otro mal payaso  
para ti.

On the corner it's very easy  
you can see  
a child working  
and he pretends to smile  
while juggling balls  
in order to live  
he's just another bad clown  
to you.

Gran circo es esta ciudad (Maldita Vecindad 1991). This city is a great circus.

With “Un poco de sangre” (“A little bit of blood”) the band continues its critique of deep income inequality through the story of a rich *junior* who carelessly hits a young boy earning money by washing car windshields on busy city streets, leaving the *junior's* brand new white luxury car stained with blood. The *junior* races through the streets in his car, everyone

stops to see, but the boy working in the street can't dodge the car. The song laments, "demasiada sangre en esta ciudad" ("there's too much blood in this city"). Other songs use a lighter touch when talking about informal employment. "Toño," for example, tells of a trumpet player named Toño who plays on the street and is famous throughout the neighborhood. "El Solín" is another character from the neighborhood who is unable to find formal work, suffers at the hands of "justice," and becomes a fortune teller and hypnotist.

*El Circo* used music to communicate the harsh realities associated with living in Mexico during the early 1990s. The stories collected on the album were familiar to Mexicans from all socio-economic classes. Most had experienced economic injustice and anyone who had been to one of Mexico's cities had witnessed the informal economy in action – an economy dominated by the young and the poor. Writing at the twentieth anniversary of the album's release, journalist, radio programmer, and long-time rock music advocate, Rulo, explains that *El Circo* is:

disco que quizá mejor que ningún otro de rock captura la experiencia de habitar nuestra ciudad.... Nuestras calles son un circo, donde la tragedia y la fiesta van de la mano, donde el espíritu humano no se deja aplastar por las adversidades (Rulo 2011a).

an album that perhaps better than any other rock album captures the experience of inhabiting our city.... Our streets are a circus, where tragedy and fiesta go hand in hand, where the human spirit will not be crushed by adversity.

Maldita Vecindad continued to chronicle Mexican life on its later albums. "No les creo nada" ("I don't believe them at all") from their 1996 album, *Baile de Máscaras* (*Dance of the Masks*), critiques the television personalities who "mienten mucho" ("lie a lot"). Meanwhile "El dedo" directly chastises the PRI: "Discourse, promises, that's what they give us; It appears natural, nothing makes them change; According to what they say, we're very happy." The band laments that it is "the same old story" – the PRI dominates politics, democracy is a farce, and the party insists that Mexicans are pleased with the set-up.

Arguably the most internationally influential Mexican rock band to date, Café Tacuba formed in 1989, released a self-titled debut album in 1992, toured extensively throughout Mexico, and then released its iconic album *Re* in 1994. While the band continued to be prolific throughout the 1990s and 2000s – winning many Grammy’s and many more Latin Grammy’s and playing sold-out shows to crowds of 100,000-plus – it is with *Re* that the band proved itself as a serious, creative, genre-bending group unlike anything Mexico had seen. As journalist and music critic Lechner explains: “Listening to the whole [album] in one sitting, it was easy to realize that Tacuba<sup>45</sup> had humble aspirations: they just wanted to change the world. In fact, many consider *Ré* [sic] to be the apex of [rock en español]” (Lechner 2006: 25).

Like Maldita Vecindad and other artists of the time, Café Tacuba wished to highlight its *mexicanidad* (Mexicaness). Lead singer Rubén Albarrán insisted:

[En] nuestra región es muy común ver que volteamos la mirada para afuera, hacia otras latitudes y culturas. Nosotros, en cambio, miramos hacia adentro, nuestra cultura es muy variada....

[In] our region it is very common to see people looking outside toward other latitudes and cultures. We, on the other hand, look inside – our culture is very diverse....

Ya es tiempo de que los jóvenes den su valor a las tradiciones mexicanas, ya estamos hartos de las influencias extranjeras en todos los aspectos (Dillon 1997: 76).

It’s time now that the youth give value to Mexican traditions, we are fed up with foreign influences in all aspects.<sup>46</sup>

The album’s musical style combined many forms of traditional Mexican music with foreign rock influences. The break-out single of *Re*, “La Ingrata,” demonstrates this evolution. The video takes the viewer to Satélite, the Mexico City suburb from which the band comes. The “La Ingrata” video features the unmistakable Torres Satélite, towers designed by famous

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<sup>45</sup> The band’s name has sometimes been spelled with a “v” in place of the “u.” In this dissertation, the “u” will be used as it is what the band currently uses in its website URL and most recent publicity.

<sup>46</sup> The translation of this sentence is provided in Dillon’s original text.

Mexican architect Luis Barragán. Singing in the streets in front of the towers, the band is surrounded by fans and onlookers. This homage to their home, however, is balanced by numerous references to other Mexican locations. At one point the song shifts genres, incorporating a classic *ranchera* style into the fast-paced rock anthem. As described in chapter three, *rancheras* are uniquely Mexican songs closely tied to national identity and popular culture and were made famous during the first half of the twentieth century as laments about lost loves, women (and occasionally men) behaving badly, and drowning one's sorrows in alcohol (Rubenstein 2001: 210). Accompanying the *ranchera* verses in "La Ingrata" are scenes of the band members in a cantina, leaning over glasses of beer and drinking their unhappiness away.

"Trópico de Cáncer" tells the story of Salvador, "salvador de la humanidad" ("savior of humanity"), and begins with a request from oil company engineers to the young Salvador to continue working. After all, they say, "todavía hay mucho verdor" ("there is still a lot of greenery") and he is the savior, "un puente entre el salvajismo y el modernismo" ("a bridge between savageness and modernity"). It is, the company contends, their job to teach indigenous people how to live in cities, "como la gente" ("like people") (Café Tacuba 1994)! In response, Salvador comments that while it is difficult to leave his colleagues, the time has come to "darle lugar a los espacios sin cemento" ("make room for spaces without cement"). And for that reason he is leaving, he states, "no quiero tener nada que ver con esa fea relacion de acción, construcción-destrucción" ("I don't want to have anything to do with the ugly relationship of action, construction-destruction"). The song concludes with an acknowledgement of the survivors of San Juan Ixhuatepec, the site of a national petroleum (PEMEX) terminal that exploded in 1984 killing 500 people (National Academy of Engineering 1986: 215).

“El Fin de la Infancia” (“The End of Childhood”) continues this pattern of discussing major national issues in song. Using the metaphor of dance, the song declares independence from conquistadores and imperialists. After almost five centuries (the period from the Spanish conquest to the present day), the band declares that it is ready to follow its own lead: “porque ya estoy grandecito, para decidir mi vida, quinientos años frustrados, creo que ya fue gran medida” (“because now I’m grown up, and can decide my life, 500 frustrated years, I think that is plenty”). In this declaration, the band states, “yo no me voy a matar por convicciones ajenas” (“I’m not going to kill myself for somebody else’s convictions”). Then, repeating its position, it rhetorically asks: “Seremos capaces de bailar por nuestra cuenta? Seremos capaces de bailar? ¡Basta ya de interrogar!” (“Will we be capable of dancing by ourselves? Will we be capable of dancing? Enough with the interrogation!”).

Occasionally compared with The Beatles’ *White Album*, *Re* is a tour-de-force from a young band from suburban Mexico City (Prensa Latina 2001). Like Maldita Vecindad’s *El Circo*, on *Re* Café Tacuba focused on Mexico and grappled with daily life and national identity in a direct way in its lyrics, while combining them with playful, stylistically creative, and engaging music that appealed to a mass audience both in Mexico and abroad.

#### *Molotov’s ¿Dónde jugarán las niñas? – 1997*

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This trend of chronicling daily life and national politics in Mexico continued throughout the 1990s and is evidenced clearly on Molotov’s debut *¿Dónde jugarán las niñas?* (*Where will the little girls play?*). A satiric parody of the highly commercial Mexican pop-rock band Maná’s *¿Dónde jugarán los niños?* (*Where will the children play?*), Molotov’s mocking album jests, provokes, insults, and profanes. Simultaneously, the album – released in 1997 during a highly contentious political period (see second section of this chapter) – offered biting

critique of run-away greed, nepotism, and deep corruption that extended throughout the PRI government and into many facets of the mass media. Of the album, Lechner writes: “That collection’s vitriolic wit and crass language shocked Mexico’s conservative society, delighted its youth, and went on to sell 1.2 million copies worldwide—a staggering number for Latin rock... Nothing beats Molotov’s debut when it comes to sheer explosiveness and attitude” (Lechner 2006: 124).

The first song on the album is “Que no te haga bobo Jacobo,” a scathing critique of Televisa news magazine show host Jacobo Zabludovsky who is “among the most powerful men in Mexico, [friend] to presidents and corporate executives the world over” (Martínez 1992: 159). As the title indicates, the song entreats listeners to not let Jacobo make fools of them by chronicling the many ways Jacobo (and by extension both the Televisa television network and the PRI) manipulate the public. Addressing Zabludovsky directly, the singer accuses:

<p>Le tiras pedradas a algunos partidos  enjuicias personas al aire y en vivo  olvidas noticias sobre la guerrilla  y todos los fraudes les cambias las cifras.</p>	<p>You throw stones at some parties  you prosecute people live and on air  you forget news about the war  and you change all the figures about frauds.</p>
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The chorus then turns to the public, asking listeners, “Que no te haga bobo Jacobo/ que no te haga bruto ese puto” (“Don’t let Jacobo make a fool of you/don’t let that asshole make you stupid”) (Molotov 1997). The song concludes with references to Zabludovsky’s role as a news anchor:

<p>Maldito Jacobo chismoso traidor  le guardas secretos a nuestra nación.  Un corte y regresas en lo que le arreglas  te llegan reportes después los alteras  a todos nos miente nos miente Jacobo (ibid.).</p>	<p>Damned Jacobo gossipy traitor  you keep the secrets of our nation.  A break and you return with whatever you’ve  fixed  reports come to you and you alter them  he lies to all of us, Jacobo lies to us.</p>
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Encouraging people to not let Jacobo and the news media fool them, Molotov articulates a widespread suspicion that the media are complicit in government corruption by taking bribes, falsifying information, and downplaying certain events while celebrating others.

One of the biggest hits from the album is “Gimme Tha Power,” a bilingual explosion that continues to vent Molotov’s anger toward the government and draws attention to the ways in which the PRI manipulates the citizenry daily.

Hay que arrancar el problema de raíz Y cambiar al gobierno de nuestro país. A la gente que está en la burocracia, A esa gente que le gustan las migajas (ibid.).	We need to pull out the problem from its roots And change the government of our country To the people who are part of the bureaucracy, To those people who like the crumbs.
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The band goes on to lament that if you give more power to the powerful then they will fuck with you even more (“Si le das más poder al poder, más duro te van a venir a cojer”). The solution they offer is to turn the tables. Singing in Spanish and English, they say: “Dame, dame, dame, dame todo el power para que te demos en la madre. Gimme todo el poder so I can come around to joder” (“Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme all of the power so that we can mess with you. Gimme all of the power so I can come around to fuck things up”).<sup>47</sup> They also offer a rallying cry, entreating people to let the powerful feel “el power mexicano” because together Mexicans are stronger and need not continue following a “bola de pendejos” (“a group of idiots”).

For all of the swagger of “No te haga bobo Jacobo” and “Dame todo el power,” much of the rest of Molotov’s debut album (as well as subsequent albums) is made up of sexual innuendo, clever sexual double entendre, and general raucous outrageousness. Still, “Molotov’s debut raised the stakes as far as how outspoken you could be about criticizing the establishment and still get away with it” (Lechner 2006: 125). Lechner asks: “Did this

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<sup>47</sup> This is a rough translation of complicated Mexican slang.

newly acquired freedom help the music [*rock en español*], allowing it to liberate itself and explore new territories? Sure it did” (ibid.).

\* \* \*

Molotov’s political messages are not threaded throughout their music in the way that Maldita Vecindad’s are. Nor is their music as sonically accessible as that of Maldita Vecindad or Café Tacuba. Nevertheless, these three bands made an indelible mark on *rock en español* of the 1990s, helped popularize and make famous Mexican rock music, and used a popular culture format to draw attention to the ineptitude, corruption, and disgrace of the Mexican government at the time. As one of Mexico’s most well-known and prolific veteran rockers recounted to this author in April 2011, in the early 1990s there was a desire to represent in music a search for identity, as well as the general restlessness that existed for youth in Mexico at the time (personal interview 2011). The musician noted that many groups participated in this project – each doing it in a different way and each feeding off of and feeling inspired by one another; thus, each group ended up having its own identity. In general there was a lot of energy, a lot of movement and people identified with the music because it resonated so well. He explained: “En aquel momento había una búsqueda de decir ‘de aquí somos’ y con estas herramientas que tenemos podemos crear algo de hoy día sin tener que ser un mariachi nada más y no tampoco diciéndole no al mariachi” (“At that time there was a search to say ‘we’re from here’ and with the tools that we have we’ll create something contemporary without it having to be mariachi and nothing else, but at the same time not saying no to mariachi”). Thus illustrating how pride of place was mixed with foreign musical influences to create something fresh and innovative. This veteran *rockero* went on to say that there was:

descontento con la sistema, con la política.  
Un desencanto con el país. Una desilusión

dissatisfaction with the system, with politics.  
Dissatisfaction with the country.

combinada con tristeza, pero con un amor muy profundo. Y que obviamente iba a estar reflejada en las canciones (ibid.).

Disillusionment combined with sadness, but with a very deep love. And all of this was obviously going to be reflected in the songs.

Importantly, the energy and creativity that were made manifest in the rock music of the time was part of something larger – a discourse around politics, political participation, and social commentary that people were looking for and developing. An important facet of this trend was that it broke a “cycle of imitation” of the United States and Europe and looked to internal influences and experiences (ibid.). There was a sense of risk and danger, but also of freedom and exploration that was felt both in the rock music of the time and in politics.

Not all the Mexican rock music of the time was as explicit in this trend as the artists listed above. Nevertheless, Mexican musicians such as Caifanes, Santa Sabina, Tex Tex, Real de Catorce, and later Julieta Venegas and Ely Guerra among many others, adopted rock music as their own and contributed to what one Mexican radio programmer called “la época dorada de rock [mexicano]” (“the golden age of [Mexican] rock”) (personal interview 2010). This period, from 1988 to 1997 was a period where national pride was a major part of rock music; where daily life was chronicled from different perspectives; where each group’s identity was distinct enough to speak to a particular audience; but where many groups influenced and inspired one another. As the musician quoted above also noted, “también había una sana competencia... era inspirador. Tenía una ganas de hacer cosas” (“there was also a healthy competition... it was inspiring. It made you want to do things”).

A major contributor to this “golden age” was a dramatic opening of the mass media. Once closed off and tending toward repression and censorship when it came to rock music, the mainstream press, television, and particularly the radio were central to the success of Mexican rock in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. How this came to be and the impact it would have is the topic of the following section.

In 1991, Maldita Vecindad was invited to Televisa to perform live for the infotainment network Galavisión (Martínez 1992: 159). The encounter sums up the bizarre relationship between the mass media, politics, rock music, and youth at the time. After all, Galavisión's owner, Televisa, was home to the same Jacobo Zabludovsky referred to in the Molotov song referenced above and, thus, emblematic of the greed, corruption, and inequality that Maldita Vecindad recounted on *El Circo*. At the same time, Televisa was a powerful media conglomerate with the ability to reach millions of people. As one of the few media outlets in the country, it had been a major part of people's media landscape for decades. Writing in the early 1990s, journalist Rubén Martínez explained:

Though it is often considered synonymous with *el PRI*, Televisa may be more powerful than the party. It is one tentacle of the country's most powerful business cartel, the Monterrey Group, which owns over 90 percent of television outlets, numerous radio stations, an important record label, and, to boot, the country's biggest brewery. If you want to reach the masses, Televisa is the only way (Martínez 1992: 159).

Televisa had therefore been an important vehicle for the promotion of a national, *Mexican* identity – created, packaged, and promoted by the PRI since the 1930s. “This corporation prides itself on nationalism, a tune that's made it millions and that the PRI government has also used to help keep itself in power for the last seventy years. It's a bastion of national pride...” (ibid.: 152). The irony, as Martínez also noted, is that “Maldita and other young bands, like Café Tacuba, Santa Sabina and Tex Tex lash out at the Americanization of the Mexican middle class, a tendency led by media giant Televisa” (ibid.).

Therefore, Maldita Vecindad's presence on Televisa was full of contradictions. The band wanted to share its anti-establishment music with a larger, national audience and used the establishment to do so. Many people accused the band of having sold out. But Maldita

Vecindad was proud of its subversion, preferring to see itself on stage rather than some pop icon (Rulo 2011a). Martínez was present the day in 1991 when Maldita Vecindad appeared on Televisa for the first time and describes it in colorful detail:

Televisa staffers crowd the plate-glass windows that seal off the newsroom, watching the band make an only half-serious effort to lip synch to the recording. Restrained at first, [lead singer] Roco begins jumping tentatively, but it's not until the second song, the Veracruz-style "Morenaza," that the band really loosens up.... And Roco is now all over the [bright white] waxed floor, collapsing his legs, flailing them outward in a leap, skidding and sliding ... and then I notice it: from the moment he hit the stage, Roco's black work boots (just like his father's) have been scuffing the Televisa floor like jet tires on a runway. [News anchorwoman] Rocío Villa García is drop-jawed in horror. Technicians are making exaggerated hand signals, trying to settle Roco down. But no! Roco is blind to the world, on the verge of knocking himself out dancing as the song slowly fades (Martínez 1992: 160-161).

Literally defacing Televisa at the network's own invitation would have felt like a victory for many Mexican rock musicians in the late 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, when Café Tacuba made its network debut, the band members came across as excited, shy, and humble, while at the same time giving false names and fibbing about their ethnicity during their interview with the variety show host (Contreras and Cravioto 2010). That these bands were invited on the conservative, PRI-allied Televisa at all was indicative of major changes taking place throughout mass media and that Mexican rock was finding its way into mainstream culture.

Political scientist Chappell H. Lawson argues that "Mexico's media...grew quite free and pluralistic during the 1990s" (Lawson 2004: 374). Beginning in the mid-1970s, an independent press began to emerge in Mexico. Periodically stifled and abused by the government, a number of independent publications managed to establish themselves during the 1980s, gaining an increasingly large readership, and becoming firmly established by the 1994 presidential elections (ibid.). Broadcast media was slower to liberate itself from government control, but both radio and television showed signs of independence following the 1985 earthquake when "feisty [radio] talk programs came to dominate the airwaves in

major cities” (ibid.). By 1997, with the death of media magnate and Televisa head Emilio Azcárraga Milmo and the succession of his 29 year-old son, “Mexican broadcasting had become dramatically more independent and pluralistic” (ibid.).

Until that point, the elder Azcárraga had been clear in his (and his network’s) support of the PRI with statements like: “we are obviously soldiers of the President” and “Televisa considers itself part of the government system” (ibid.: 377). But with Salinas’ neoliberalization of the economy, Mexico had declared itself sympathetic to private markets and international trade, thus opening itself to increasingly diverse media. As Lawson explains, the PRI walked a fine line when it came to the media – exercising a great deal of control, but also allowing a certain amount of dissident expression so as to *appear* democratic: “Mexico’s media were much more varied and independent than media in many autocratic regimes, but they were nevertheless manipulated and controlled through an array of subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – mechanisms” (ibid.: 384).

One area where the PRI conceded notably during the Salinas and Zedillo administrations, as compared to those that preceded them, was youth-oriented radio.

A partir del sexenio de Carlos Salinas de Gortari comenzó una especial apertura hacia el rock, en una etapa económica en la que la participación de la empresa privada y la globalización comenzaron a generar recursos para apoyar las tocaditas de rock... (Torres Medina 2002: 92).

From the time of Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s *sexenio* a special opening began toward rock, in an economic period during which the participation of private business and globalization began to generate resources that went to support rock shows....

Not only did the government offer financial support for radio stations like Rock 101 and *Estéreo Joven* (Youth Stereo) 105.7 (the latter, part of the government-run Mexican Institute for Radio, IMER), it also collaborated with radio stations to put on numerous conferences, concerts, and even a colloquium on the “dark” or “goth” subculture at the rock music and paraphernalia market, El Chopo (Garay Sánchez 1993; Torres Medina 2002). By the mid-

1990s Estereo Joven had become Órbita and had a great deal of company when it came to playing Spanish language, *rock nacional*: Radioactivo 98.5, Óxido 1180, Track 1320, and Rock en Radio 1290 (Interferencia 7Diez 2009: 48-49).

In addition to radio, Mexican rock's tremendous success in the late 1980s and 1990s can be attributed to the active participation of transnational record companies. As described in the previous chapter, BMG's Ariola was a pioneer in the Spanish language rock market. Warner Music signed Café Tacuba while Culebra Records, a subsidiary of Ariola, signed La Lupita, Santa Sabina, La Cuca, Tijuana No, and La Castañeda (ibid.: 48). Caifanes, Maldita Vecindad, and Fobia remained with BMG Ariola, which later signed Ely Guerra and Julieta Venegas.

A mediados de los noventa, la escena del *rock* estaba explotando como nunca y todos los medios de comunicación se abrieron al nuevo sonido, abanderado por Caifanes, Café Tacuba y Maldita Vecindad, quienes comenzaban a aparecer en programas de televisión ... y ilustraban las portadas de algunas revistas para jóvenes... (ibid.: 49).

By the mid-90s, the rock scene was exploding like never before and all of the communication media were opening up to the new sound, founded by Caifanes, Café Tacuba and Maldita Vecindad, who began appearing on television programs ... and graced the covers of youth magazines....

Significantly, the new and emerging bands of the 1990s also had places to play. The members of Botellita de Jerez opened Rockotitlán in the late 1980s (Woodside Woods 2010: 89) and by the early to mid-1990s now-legendary venues like El 9, El LUC, Tutti Frutti, and El Alicia had established themselves as training grounds for aspiring rock musicians and as must-go venues for fans seeking out the latest in Mexico's *rock en español* (Santander 2011; López Flamarique 2010). A founder of one of these venues told this author that several places took advantage of reasonable licensing fees and relatively straightforward bureaucratic procedures to open during the 1990s, noting that it would have been impossible to open his venue before the Salinas administration or after 2000 when the political winds changed yet again (personal interview 2010).

This chapter has demonstrated that while the government looked outward, embracing neoliberal economic policies, increased privatization, internationalization, and foreign financial support Mexico's exploding *rock nacional* scene turned inward and attempted to redefine the "nation" through its lyrics, music, and innovative styles. No longer content with the PRI-packaged versions of Mexican popular culture offered by the mass media, the "Holy Trinity" of Mexico's "golden age of rock" (personal interview 2010) – Caifanes, Maldita Vecindad, and Café Tacuba – led the way in consolidating rock as a mainstream popular culture form that expressed what life was like for young Mexicans in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. The PRI's international focus, its diminished direct control of the mass media, and its periodic support of rock music – via the creation of new youth-oriented radio stations, the sponsoring of mass concerts, participation in rock and youth themed conferences, and granting permission to open new venues – all contributed to the genre's success. Paradoxically, because of the PRI's assistance, it is impossible to imagine the kind of rock music described above achieving the level of popularity, commercial success, and resonance it did in any other period of Mexican history. Indeed, as Mexican society and its political landscape continued to open up, become more democratic, and more thoroughly embedded in an increasingly globalized world, Mexico's rock music would lose much of the spark and relevance it had from 1988-1997 – its "golden age." It is from 1998 to the present day that this exploration now turns.

## Chapter VI

### The Paradox of Mexican Rock:

#### Saturation and Fragmentation (1997-present)

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##### Prelude: Vive Latino 2011

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*On April 9, 2011 I boarded Mexico City's subway and headed toward El Foro Sol for the second day of a three-day music festival. The festival, Vive Latino, was in its twelfth year and my schedule for seeing well established acts as well as emerging bands was packed – but first I had to get there. The subway car I was on quickly filled and I found myself pressed against the back wall of the car and up against one of the car's few seats. I had eight stops to go and with each stop more people crowded on. With no way to get out of the car and not yet to my stop, I tried not to panic, slowed my breathing, and was thankful to be standing as I had access to the air above the person who sat below me. Crushed together, more and more people pushed their way onto the subway. If their first attempt was insufficient to create the necessary space, they tried again until people were so well-compressed that there was, literally, no more room. I couldn't help but think of Café Tacuba's 1994 song "El Metro" ("The Subway"), which tells the story of a young man trapped inside of a subway car for three or four months, unable to get out. Whenever he tries, someone pushes him back in. In my case, I felt confident that I would be able to get out of the subway car. After all, everyone was headed to the same place I was – Vive Latino.*

*Vive Latino began in 1998 and was designed as an annual<sup>48</sup> Latin American rock music festival to rival Coachella (Indio, California), Glastonbury (Somerset, England), and Bannaroo (Manchester, Tennessee). The festival was originally intended to showcase emerging rock en español acts from throughout Latin America and Spain and used well-known bands as headlining performers to draw crowds of forty to seventy thousand people each day (personal interviews 2010-2011; 2008). Since the mid-2000s, the festival has expanded its offerings to include electronic music, reggae, ska, indie, metal, and pop-rock. Over the years, the biggest names in Latin American rock have performed on the main stage of Vive*

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<sup>48</sup> There was no festival in 1999 or 2001.

*Latino, including: Café Tacuba, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, Caifanes, Molotov, Los Enanitos Verdes, Los Babasónicos, El Tri, Los Aterciopelados, Charly García, Gustavo Cerati, Julieta Venegas, Fobia, Los Auténticos Decadentes, Jarabedepalo, and many, many more. Since 2008, popular Anglo-rock bands have also been included, such as Reel Big Fish in 2008; Rise Against and Ozomatli in 2010; Devotchka, The National, Jane's Addiction, and The Chemical Brothers in 2011; and Gogol Bordello, Foster the People, TV on the Radio, Madness, and FatBoy Slim in 2012.*

*The entry to the Foro Sol (built for the 1968 Olympics and now home to concerts, soccer games, and other sporting events) is long and circuitous. Along the way, Vive Latino attendees are greeted by vendors selling food, drinks, t-shirts, bandanas, posters, and pirated CDs. Other people stand in the middle of the flowing streams of attendees, handing out volantes, fliers announcing upcoming rock music shows. Out of courtesy, habit, or curiosity volantes are accepted, collected, and perhaps glanced at before they are (usually) thrown into a trash bin or onto the ground – whatever is most convenient. After winding through the metal people movers, past ticket collection, and a security check, attendees arrive into a large sports complex. A track encircles the stadium and around the track three stages are set-up, positioned so that sound emanating from each does not interfere with the others. The main stage is erected inside the stadium. Most of the grounds are covered with a thick black fabric designed to protect the grass, but the effect is more aggressive: On this sunny April day, heat radiates from both the ground and the sky and the 70,000 people attending Vive Latino are reminded that this is no Woodstock-derived music festival with picnic blankets and lush lawn. This is an urban festival whose environment is marked by tall chain-link fences, asphalt, and concrete. We're in the middle of one of the largest cities in the world, space is limited, and the population density is high.*

*April 9th breaks attendance records for Vive Latino; the festival has never hosted so many fans (approximately 70,000) (Notimex 2011a). Of the three days, this is the only one that is sold out (though the others come close). The masses are there to see Mexico's own, Caifanes. The legendary band – who pioneered Mexican rock in the 1980s and who has not played together under that name for sixteen years – is headlining the festival. The band has been plagued by in-fighting, artistic differences, and inflated egos, but the terminal illness of one member prompted a reconciliation, and the scheduling of two reunion*

concerts: the first at Vive Latino in Mexico City, the second at Coachella in Indio, California (Woodside Woods 2011).<sup>49</sup> Most young Mexicans grew up with Caifanes, just as young people born in the 1970s in Ireland grew up with U2. The band is iconic, the band members are well-known personalities (think Mick Jagger and Keith Richards), and their songs are anthems.

*Well-known, international rock superstars play throughout the day, but interviews reveal that it is Caifanes whom attendees have come to see. Fans simply cannot resist seeing the band play together, live. There is no question about it, nostalgia is the theme of this Vive Latino (personal interviews 2011; Rangel 2011). Some of rock en español's most popular bands from the 1990s and 2000s serve as opening acts: Los Pericos (Argentina), Jarabedepalo (Spain), Los Bunkers (Chile), and Los Enanitos Verdes (Argentina). Yet, in the thirty-minute break between this last band and Caifanes' set, the anticipation is greater than it has been all day. People are antsy, breathless, barely contained. For the first time during the festival, attendees are concentrated at the main stage, the stadium is entirely filled, and the sometimes-soccer-pitch is covered. Then, from the moment Caifanes takes the stage until the end of the band's nineteen-song set, 70,000 people sing every word in unison, virtually drowning out the legendary rockers. The impact is elating and cathartic. When you sing along with a song, your mind is occupied with lyrics, key, pitch, and rhythm; it is almost impossible to think about anything else. When you do so with 70,000 other people you are truly in the moment – and for nearly two hours those who are present, are present, temporarily escaping from their everyday lives and experiencing Mexican rock music history.<sup>50</sup>*

## Introduction

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Chapter six concludes the series of chapters that have examined Mexico's rock music and its broad social and cultural context since 1980. This chapter looks at the contemporary period, beginning in 1997, and explores Mexican rock's trajectory through to the present day.

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<sup>49</sup> The band has since played more reunion shows.

<sup>50</sup> This description is based on participant observation and personal interviews. Additionally, the second day of Vive Latino 2011 was well covered in the popular press. Many articles confirm my observations. (See: Aceves and Cortés 2007; Agencia Reforma 2011; Barquera 2011; No Author 2011a, 2011d, 2011b; Notimex 2011b, 2011a; Paz 2011; Rulo 2011b).

The chapter begins with a description of the political, economic, and social contexts of the time, focusing on Mexico's first free and fair elections in 1997, the presidential terms of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón, and contemporary civil society. How youth have experienced this period of macroeconomic stability and microeconomic uncertainty is the topic of the following section. The chapter then turns to the popular rock music that young people have produced and consumed during this period, highlighting the continued boom of the late 1990s and the fractures and divisions that have characterized the scene since then. The relationship between today's rock music and Mexico's progressively more open and independent media is discussed next, though particular attention is given to the Internet and the developments in communication technology that have notably impacted this relationship. The chapter concludes with a brief description of how all of these elements fit together, foreshadowing the theoretical analysis of Mexican rock, youth, politics, and the state which will be covered in detail in the following chapter.

### [A Fragile Democracy: Mexico's Political, Economic, and Social Landscapes](#)

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Mexico's transition to democracy was in fact a long, protracted evolution that took more than three decades to unfold. The electoral reforms that began in the mid-1970s, strengthened in the 1980s, and finally proved meaningful in the 1990s were slow to bring about change but have now become institutionalized. The authoritarian, or "semi-democratic" (Levy, Bruhn, and Zebadúa 2006), regime that the PRI headed for more than seventy years and the type of centralized, top-down, monolithic control that it maintained is no longer possible in today's political, economic, and social climate. The period discussed in this chapter, 1997-present, is notable for the major electoral shifts that took place in 1997, the remarkable transfer of power from the PRI to its rival PAN (Partido de Acción

Nacional, National Action Party) in 2000, and relative economic and social stability.<sup>51</sup> As will be shown, during this period Mexico has continued along the trajectory discussed in previous chapters: it has moved ever closer to full-fledged democracy, it has increased its international ties, and it has more completely embraced neoliberal economic strategies.

Civil society, non-profit organizations, and international observers carefully monitored the midterm elections of 1997.<sup>52</sup> President Zedillo was steadfast in his commitment to free and fair elections and, for the first time since it was established, the PRI lost its majority in the *Cámara de Diputados* (Mexico's equivalent of the US Congress).<sup>53</sup> Also for the first time, elections were held to select the mayor of Mexico City. As noted in the previous chapter, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (the PRD candidate from whom the 1988 presidential elections were widely believed to have been stolen) won this post, thus bringing an opposition party leader directly into the political, economic, and cultural heart of the country.

The 2000 elections were in many ways similar to those of 1997, but there was a great deal more at stake i.e., the presidency and the potential end of the PRI's long reign. The PRI candidate Francisco Labastida was strong, but faced sophisticated campaigning from his main rival Vicente Fox of the right-leaning PAN. Fox was an unexpected choice for the PAN. Though he had served as the governor of the central state, Guanajuato, he had remained outside of party leadership. The left-leaning PRD candidate was once again Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas who remained popular on the left but was unable to harness the

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<sup>51</sup> The obvious exception to this stability is the frequently referenced and much discussed violence associated with the drug trade. This topic will be covered below.

<sup>52</sup> In 1996, Mexico's Congress passed legislation making the national electoral board (IFE, Instituto Federal Electoral) independent of the ruling party, thus enabling it to operate outside of the purview of the PRI (Camp 2003: 196).

<sup>53</sup> Camp notes that Zedillo fundamentally altered Mexico's political landscape by decentralizing presidential decision-making; granting governors increased autonomy; separating the party from the state; and strengthening other government institutions, specifically the legislature, judiciary, and the IFE (ibid.: 257).

support of a broad enough spectrum of the electorate. A number of changes in campaign rules, election policies, and media coverage helped to even the playing field for the candidates. Fox was able to capitalize on his business credentials, promising an extension of the neoliberal, internationally oriented economic policies that had helped stabilize the country since 1995. Additionally, Fox appealed to young, educated Mexicans who were extremely skeptical of the PRI, having grown up during a period when PRI corruption, greed, and economic mismanagement were rampant and well-known (Levy et al. 2006: 176).

On July 2, 2000 Vicente Fox was elected president, ending the PRI's seven-decade-long hold on power. Unlike other presidential elections, there was little debate about the legitimacy of these results. Fox won forty-three percent of the vote, Labastida received thirty-six percent, and Cárdenas earned seventeen percent. Zedillo's decision not to interfere with the outcome was significant: "Zedillo's rapid and uncompromising acceptance of PRI defeat in 2000 produced an immediate 6 percent surge in the Mexican stock market, as investors rewarded the peaceful transition" (Levy et al. 2006: 174). Fox's *sexenio* was remarkable, but primarily because of the simple fact that he did not represent the PRI. Economically and politically, Fox was unable to accomplish very much. He faced a sharply divided legislature, the states were similarly split in their leadership, and the power structures (hierarchies, systems of graft, corruption, etc.) that had existed for decades of PRI control were suddenly dismantled without centralized authority and a clear chain of command, thus creating considerable instability and confusion. During his campaign, Fox made great promises for job creation, labor reform, GDP growth, and reductions in crime and corruption. So deep was his commitment to end corruption (and so pervasive was the problem) that three days after taking office he created two new agencies: the Commission

for Transparency and Combat against Corruption and the Federal Agency of Investigation to oversee the federal judicial police (*ibid.*: 137-138).

In the end, Mexico was able to maintain a modest level of growth during Fox's administration (an average of three percent annually); strict fiscal control led to a balanced budget and reduced inflation; and "Fox's economic team gave Mexico a presidential term without a major financial crisis for the first time in decades" (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 114). This period of relative economic stability continued into the next *sexenio*. In 2006, the PAN once again won the presidency when Felipe Calderón bested PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO for short. The controversial elections resulted in a Calderón margin of victory of approximately one half of one percent. Indeed, the election was so close that AMLO alleged fraud had taken place. He refused to concede the election and for three months, he and his supporters camped out and protested in the streets of Mexico City, crippling the daily routines of the megalopolis (*ibid.*).

Calderón's campaign centered around job creation, but shortly after taking office his focus became dismantling Mexico's illegal drug trade (McKinley 2007). A major facet of this endeavor included ending corruption inside of local government and police forces in areas where drug cartels have essentially bought official allegiance for many years. Additionally, Calderón enlisted Mexico's military, granting it an expanded crime-fighting role, and using it like a federal police force (Archibold, Cave, and Malkin 2011). To a certain extent these efforts appear to be working – many known drug lords have been arrested, cartel leadership has been gutted, and record amounts of drugs have been seized (2011c). However, this destabilization and attempts by rival gangs to regain new or lost territory have resulted in a significant rise in violent crime (*ibid.*).

Calderón's efforts to undermine drug cartels in Mexico have weakened him politically as increased violence resulting from his efforts has devastated cities and even entire regions of the country. Many people express that they are sickened by and fed up with the gruesome violence, which they see as outweighing any gains made in stopping (or slowing down) the drug trade in Mexico (ibid.; personal interviews 2010-2011). Calderón, the PAN, and rival political parties are increasingly mindful of public opinion as civil society has continued to become a strong watchdog of political decision-making. Political scientists comment that "democratization in Mexico owes much to the push from below" (Levy et al. 2006: 68). Government decisions during the 1990s and 2000s to internationalize and privatize economically, have led to increased transparency and accountability. In turn, they have also meant an opening for civic participation and mutually reinforcing processes of accountability. Political scientists Levy et al. explain: "Economic crisis and reform deeply affected social conditions and political behavior, but political behavior and social conditions also affected the management and relative success of economic reform" (ibid.: 171). Meanwhile, other scholars note, "the separation and balance of powers has been considerably strengthened in the past fifteen years, and Mexican voters believe they have a meaningful role to play in the electoral and political processes" (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 2009: 117).

In a democracy where political parties compete with one another and vie for the support of voters, the government, its leaders, and its opponents are forced to be cognizant of what people think. While seemingly obvious, such accountability had been absent during the seventy-plus years of PRI control. As novelist and social commentator Carlos Fuentes writes: "It's easy to forget people's rights, especially in a system that until recently had been authoritarian, in which leaders, who weren't elected, saw no need to respond to anybody.

Today citizens are active, mobilized, and aware. And they're here today, seeking to defend themselves and their loved ones" (quoted in Preston and Dillon 2004: 393). Increased political competition does not produce an awakened civil society over night, however, and Fuentes is right to point out that the change is recent. Mexicans are slowly growing accustomed to this new environment and are beginning to exercise their voices in more direct and productive ways. Still, decades of non-participation (because there was no point) have deeply affected Mexicans. As Levy et al. argue: "Too many Mexicans remain 'subjects' rather than 'participants.' Some analysts see a tendency for Mexicans to wait and hope that things will improve rather than to act" (Levy et al. 2006: 127). This behavior is entrenched and while signs are positive that Mexico's political culture is changing, an even more active and participatory citizenry will take some time to foment.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, from 1997 to the present, Mexico has seen some remarkable changes. No longer shackled by an authoritarian or "semi-democratic" regime, the country has convincingly transitioned to a functioning democracy with competitive, free, and fair elections. Macro-economically, Mexico has remained relatively stable through two presidential cycles without the major economic crises that hampered development in the 1980s and early 1990s. Despite these considerable gains, neoliberalism and national economic stability have not translated into greater equality. The Revolutionary principles upon which the PRI established its long domination – protection from outside (i.e., US) influence and increased equality through resource re-distribution – are no longer central to government policy-making, but remain highly relevant to citizens. Mexico maintains one of the highest levels of inequality in the Americas and 47.4% of its population lives at or below

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<sup>54</sup> Camp explains that reasons behind voter disenchantment are generally the same now as they were when the PRI controlled everything: "incompetence, unfulfilled campaign pledges, and corruption" (Camp 2003: 212).

the poverty line (World Bank 2011). Since the 1980s, the poor have become poorer, while the rich have become richer (ibid.). As Levy et al. point out, transitioning to democracy has not been universally beneficial. These authors note that the marginalized are often left out, as formal democratic institutions do not necessarily help them, and without the advantages of money, education, and time they may have little opportunity to organize or to organize effectively (Levy et al. 2006: 262).

Simultaneously, two processes have contributed to considerable instability in Mexico's new democracy. Both the disintegration of the PRI and efforts to undermine drug cartels have created power vacuums throughout the country. Long established power structures have been dismantled creating confusion and renewed competition for power and/or territory (Quinones 2007). To these processes have been added the H1N1 flu scare in 2009, the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, and, under the Obama administration, the strictest US immigration enforcement in decades (O'Toole 2011). Together, all of these factors have meant decreased tourism and reduced remittances from the US – two of the most important sources of income for Mexico (U.S. Department of State 2011). While it is too early to know what the impact of all of this will be for Mexico and its citizens, in interviews many people referred to the current “crisis” facing the country (personal interviews 2010-2011). The term “crisis” was a commonly used descriptor throughout the “lost decade” of the 1980s and during the peso devaluation of the mid-1990s. The return of its use is both telling and troubling.

How young people have experienced the contemporary period of significant political change, macro-economic stability, and micro-economic uncertainty is the topic of the following section.

According to Mexican anthropologist Alfredo Nateras Dominguez, Mexico’s young people best demonstrate the social crisis and disenchantment that characterize Mexico today. Nateras Dominguez studies youth culture, specifically youth subcultures such as the punks and “darketos” (or goths), and his studies have revealed general trends facing youth of all socio-economic backgrounds in Mexico today. Namely, there is a “crisis institucional,” an institutional crisis where the government, political parties, the Catholic Church, the military, the police, the media, and educational institutions have lost their credibility. In spite of the successful transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN, little has changed macro-economically and institutionally and Nateras Dominguez argues that this is felt most acutely by young people (as will be explained shortly) (Nateras Dominguez 2005: 9). Additionally, devastating poverty in many Latin American countries disproportionately affects young people, many of whom live on less than one dollar per day (ibid.). Finally, rampant violence has become part of everyday life in Mexico. One scholar told this author: “*acá se respira violencia*” (“here we *breathe* violence”) (personal interview 2010). Whether experienced directly or not, no one can escape violent images on television, in sensationalistic newspaper coverage, in film, and even in informal conversation (Reguillo Cruz 2010a; Urteaga Castro Pozo 2010). All of this leads scholars of young people in Mexico to the conclusion that the future is bleak for youth:

[D]iremos que éstos jóvenes, en su mayoría, son los hijos de la postcrisis, en tanto que para algunos, no solamente no hay futuro (como lo decían los punks) sino que no habrá futuro (como lo dicen los darketos), por lo que son jóvenes que dan cuenta de una especie de melancolías colectivas por el fin de las certezas y la quiebra de los sentidos que articulaban la vida social. Muchos de

We’ll say that these young people, for the most part, are children of the post-crisis, in so much as for some, not only is there no future (as the punks say) but nor will there be a future (as the *darketos* say) – they are youth that are aware of a type of collective melancholy due to the end of certainties and the bankruptcy of the senses that articulate social life. Many of them prefer to take

ellos prefieren refugiarse en viajes internos justo como una respuesta ante las imposibilidades de mejorar las condiciones materiales y espirituales de vida en el aquí y en el ahora de su existencia (Nateras Dominguez 2005).

refuge in internal trips as a response to the impossibility of improving the material and spiritual conditions in the here and now of their existence.

An important manifestation of the crisis experienced by young people today is the “nini” phenomenon, young people who “ni estudian, ni trabajan” (“neither study nor work”). The concept of the “nini” has been popular in the press from the beginning of 2010 to the present and has become a social preoccupation in contemporary Mexico. According to recent government statistics there are 36.2 million young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-nine in Mexico (approximately the same as the population of the entire US state of California); they make up thirty-two percent of Mexico’s population; of this group, approximately one in four neither studies nor works (CNNMexico 2011). Many factors are blamed for this: first, while primary education is mandated for all Mexicans, secondary and higher education are inaccessible (academically and financially) for many – young Mexicans often need to work to support their families (ibid); second, the global economic crisis of the late 2000s has meant that employment opportunities are scarce across age ranges, but this scarcity has disproportionately impacted young people (Valdez 2010); third, tighter immigration policies and economic woes in the United States have meant that many of Mexico’s “ninis” who, in decades past, would have migrated to the US for work, are no longer able to do so, thus shining a brighter light on the “nini” phenomenon that was somewhat hidden in the days of greater movement across the northern border (Paterson 2010).

Mexico’s young people who neither study nor work are of great concern to policy makers and social scientists, alike. The International Labor Organization has “warned of a ‘lost generation’ made up of young people who ‘have dropped out of the labour market,

having lost all hope of being able to work for a decent living” (ibid.). One political analyst commented, “Los ‘ninis’ pueden convertirse en un problema de implosión social, y en algún momento en un problema político y de gobernabilidad” (“The ‘ninis’ could become a problem of social implosion, and at some point a political and governability problem”) (quoted in CNNMexico 2011). A specialist in youth psychology voiced concern that these young people “pueden llegar a ser sociópatas, delincuentes o llegar al suicidio” (“could become sociopaths, delinquents, or end up committing suicide”) (quoted in Bernstein n.d.).

On the other hand, many people are encouraged by the entrepreneurial spirit evidenced by today’s young people: “Especialistas coinciden en que parte de este sector de la población tiene gran capacidad creativa, pero no encuentran espacio para desarrollarla” (“Specialists agree that a large part of this sector of the population has great creative capacity, but they cannot find space in which to develop it”) (ibid.). Still others see today’s young people – both “ninis” and their working and/or studying counterparts – as an important political force with the potential to sway elections:

Tradicionalmente a los jóvenes no les interesa ejercer su derecho a votar porque simple y llanamente no creen en las promesas de los candidatos ni mucho menos en los dirigentes de los partidos políticos, sin embargo luego del fuerte impacto que causó la noticia de los NiNi’s ... se dieron cuenta de la necesidad de participar más en actividades políticas para exigir ser tomados en cuenta a través de las redes sociales (Govea Torres 2011).

Traditionally, young people have not been interested in their right to vote, simply and frankly because they don’t believe in the promises candidates make much less in the leaders of political parties, nevertheless, after the strong impact that news of the NiNis made ... via social networks they became aware of the need to participate in political activities more and demanded to be taken into consideration.

After all, thirty-two percent of Mexico’s youth are of voting age (CNNMexico 2011) and thirty-two percent of 36 million is a lot of votes (about 11.5 million) in a country where the last presidential election was as close as one half of one percent!

For many years, from *los chavos banda* discussed in chapter four, to the *culturas juveniles* described in chapter five, Mexican researchers have documented the precarious position that young people occupy, especially in relation to the state. Since the late 1960s, young people have been deemed dangerous because of their excess of free time, ability to gather in large groups, and potential to organize against the government (Monsiváis 1992; Paredes Pacho 1992; Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998; Poniadowska 2002; Arau 2010). As this dissertation has demonstrated, because of the government's fear of youth, many of their activities were satanized, considered immoral, and generally believed to be a threat to the nation and national identity. As such, when scholars became concerned about the wellbeing of youth, their studies focused on this relationship (for about twenty years, beginning in the 1980s). According to many interviews, this relationship has deteriorated since the early 2000s. If the PRI was afraid of young people, the PAN is even more concerned by them. As one scholar of Mexican youth put it:

[L]a situación para los jóvenes en México sí está muy cruda en este momento.... [Hay] un malestar generalizado... Pienso que ser joven en México está bastante difícil para la gran mayoría de la población (personal interview 2010).

[T]he situation for young people in Mexico is very crude at this time.... [There is] a general malaise.... I think that to be a young person in Mexico is quite difficult for the vast majority of the population.

According to one youth advocate this unfortunate situation has left young people with few institutionalized rights and has been de-politicizing. He lamented:

Los jóvenes están volviendo muy apolíticos. No les interesa lo que está pasando en el país.... No tienen derecho a la escuela, no tienen derecho a trabajo, no tienen derecho a una familia, no tienen derecho a una casa, no tienen derecho a tener una vida propia (personal interview 2010)!

Young people are becoming very apolitical. They're not interested in what's going on in the country.... They don't have the right to schooling, they don't have the right to employment, they don't have the right to a family, they don't have the right to a house, they don't have the right to a life of their own!

In spite of this, the small cadre of academics who have devoted their careers to better understanding Mexico's youth, have grown tired of representations of young people as delinquent, deviant, and involved in the drug trade, and also see a focus on these things as over-representing a relatively small population. As one scholar commented to this author, "no todos los chavos están metidos en el narcotráfico. Ni es la gran mayoría que es el imagen que intenta dar el gobierno mexicano" ("not all young people are involved in the drug trade. Nor is it the great majority, as the Mexican government attempts to portray") (personal interview 2010). Though daunted by the depressing reality facing young people today – "No hay empleo, ni hay empleo chatarra en este momento" ("There's no employment, there's not even under-employment right now") (ibid.) – many are buoyed by the creativity, innovation, and initiative demonstrated by many of Mexico's youthful population, and they are turning their studies away from subcultures and social deviance. For example, in a recent edited volume, some of the most well-respected and prolific scholars of Mexican youth examine such understudied issues as gender, class, and ethnicity; education; rural and indigenous youth; performativity and youth bodies; sexuality; masculinity; and youth and communication technology (Reguillo Cruz 2010b).<sup>55</sup> One scholar argues that what is most inspiring and interesting about young people today are the many ways they are facing "la crisis" head-on:

Ante la crisis hay que responder con salidas y alternativas que están creando en las generaciones más jóvenes. No en las generaciones más viejas que ya están totalmente desorientadas, shoceadas. Hay un shock allí de [una inhalación aguda] "El mundo se acabó." El mundo *empezó* para los más jóvenes (personal interview 2010).

The crisis must be met with outlets and alternatives, which the youngest generations are creating. Not so much in the older generations who are now totally disoriented, shocked. There's a shock there, a [sharp intake of breath] "The world is ending." The world is just *beginning* for the younger ones.

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<sup>55</sup> Chapters seven and eight discuss this dissertation's contribution to, and place within, the field of scholarship on Mexican youth.

While the economic and social realities of Mexico have remained challenging for young people from the late 1990s to the present, scholars are finding (and this author has also found) that young people in growing numbers are actively seeking alternatives.

In sum, it is clear that the situation for young people in Mexico today is bleak, as manifested in the preoccupation over the “nini’s” (who, without question are not *new*, but whose growing presence is a concrete reminder of Mexico’s precarious economic, political, and social situation). Young people remain a challenging sector of society for the government and policy makers. Nevertheless, scholars who have been concerned about young people for decades are slowly changing perceptions about Mexico’s youth by studying youth experiences more holistically and not focusing solely on deviant behavior, but rather on what young people are doing to confront their situations. This dissertation extends this work by examining how rock music is used by youth to make sense of their world. Today’s Mexican rock is the topic of the following section.

#### Fragmentation of a Movement: The Last Gasp of *Rock en Español* and the Perplexing Present

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This section examines today’s mainstream popular rock music, describes some of its most prevalent features, and discusses the various ways young people use contemporary Mexican rock. Mexico’s rock music from the late 1990s to the present has been dynamic, especially compared to its *guacarock* and *rock en español* predecessors. Developments in communication technology, struggles in the music industry, and international music trends have greatly influenced the genre. Given that the period is contemporary, little consensus has formed regarding the most important facets or representatives of recent Mexican rock. The characterizations that follow attempt to point out the genre’s most salient features as

described to this author by fans, musicians, music professionals, and as they are articulated in rock music magazines.

Interviewees describe the late 1990s as another boom time for *rock en español*. Molotov's "Puto" (variously translated as "Fucker"/"Faggot"/"Whore") stretched the limits of what was tolerated and acceptable on the radio. For the first time, slightly vulgar, colloquial language was heard on air. The impact this and similar songs had was profound, as one music industry professional explained: "'Puto' es el parte aguas. Es casi como la caída del muro de Berlín" ("Puto' was a watershed moment. It's almost like the fall of the Berlin Wall") (personal interview 2010). Listeners' experiences of commercial, mediated popular music were changing and suddenly there were so many bands with different ways of relating everyday life that listeners across the socio-economic spectrum were finding rock music that reflected their reality. At the same time, hugely popular bands like Café Tacuba began to look away from the national, Mexico-oriented themes that characterized their earlier work (see chapter five). With the 1999 album "Reves/Yo Soy," for example, one band member explained: "Eran temas más introspectivas, más existenciales, desde una optica más individual" ("The themes were more introspective, more existential, from a more individual point of view") (personal interview 2011). Indeed, as the new millennium started, Mexican rock began to shift away from its overtly Mexican roots, its sound became more like rock from the US and the UK as it moved away from the rhythms and instrumentation that distinguished Mexico's *rock en español* of the late 1980s and much of the 1990s (personal interviews 2010-2011).

While *rock en español* was the prominent sound of the 1990s, by the early 2000s, that subgenre's dominance of Mexican rock and its relative lack of variety had given way to

tremendous diversification and fragmentation. Ska<sup>56</sup> was the first subgenre to gain a significant following among Mexican rock music fans and established its distinct musical identity by the early 2000s (López Flamarique 2010). Other subgenres followed, including surf, emo (later called “metal-core” or “hard core melódico”), neo-punk, and indie<sup>57</sup> – to name a few. One member of a relatively new and successful Mexican rock band explains that in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, *rock en español* groups began to sound the same – their albums offered little evolution, which drove new bands to explore different sounds and pushed Mexican rock in new directions (personal interview 2010).

One thing that is certain about contemporary Mexican rock is that the audience and the genre are thoroughly fragmented. “Yo siento que la audiencia se fragmentó mucho, después del Internet” (“I feel that the audience has fragmented a lot, since the Internet”), said one music industry professional. Meanwhile, bands have proliferated. Examining rock music magazines from the late 1990s through the 2000s, it is clear that while there are a multitude of bands, few Mexican acts have been very consistent and most have been unable to garner attention for very long.<sup>58</sup> For example, in 2007 Maria Fernanda Olvera, published a large-format book profiling 150 bands that emerged in Mexico City between 2000 and 2005. The text maps and categorizes the bands, indicating where in the city they rehearse/come from and what subgenre they play. Olvera identifies twenty-six subgenres and notes that bands emerge from all but one of Mexico City’s sixteen *delegaciones* (or boroughs), as well as several of its surrounding *municipios* (suburban municipalities) (Olvera 2007). Olvera makes it

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<sup>56</sup> Ska is a genre of music that first developed in Jamaica in the 1950s and was a precursor to reggae and dance hall. It had a resurgence in popularity when it arrived with Jamaican immigrants to the UK in the 1970s and was mixed with white, British popular music of the time. Its so-called “third wave” hit the Americas in the mid-1990s, but while its staying power was limited in the United States, it has maintained its relevance in Mexico and much of Latin America to this day.

<sup>57</sup> For more information on the sound and taste cultures associated with these subgenres, see (Red 2009; Castillo Berthier 2005).

<sup>58</sup> In particular, I looked at *IndieRocks*, *Marvin*, *Warp*, *Nuestro Rock*, and assorted fanzines.

clear that these are only a sampling<sup>59</sup> of Mexico City's many bands and, since publishing her text, she has begun cataloging the music scenes of Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Tijuana. The voices within Mexico's rock have proliferated, as one musician explained:

Antes era todo el movimiento de rock en español... Todos eran parte de un movimiento del rock Mexicana. Pero ahora hay tantas bandas – están los que tocan punk, los que tocan gótico, los metaleros, los punk [sic], los del mainstream, los que no saben que son... Son miles de voccillas, nadie sabe que se hace cada quien. De política hablan muy pocas bandas (personal interview 2010).

Before it was all the *rock en español* movement... Everyone was part of a movement of Mexican rock. But now there are so many bands – there are those that play punk, those that play goth, the metal-heads, the punks [sic], the mainstream, those who don't know what they are... There are thousands of little voices, no one knows what each one does. Very few talk of politics.

This musician went on to say that in Mexico there are thousands of bands and thousands of discourses (ibid). Unlike in the previous period when *rock en español* consolidated itself as Mexican rock with its overtly political references and its chronicling of everyday life (see chapter five), today there are an unlimited number of bands, becoming increasingly niche in their appeal, and a corresponding audience that is immense but deeply fragmented.

This fragmentation means that any description of the sound of today's rock is necessarily incomplete and partial. Still, one type of music that comes close to epitomizing the period is indie rock. What "indie" means in Mexico is debated, but most interviewees agree that it emerged when the international recording industry began to contract and independently produced and/or distributed music began to take up a large share of the popular music market (personal interviews 2010-2011; the music industry will be discussed in more detail below). The sound is guitar-heavy, melodic, and influenced by international indie rock superstars (the irony here is intended and accurate), such as The Arcade Fire, Broken Social Scene, Interpol, and The Strokes. While some indie rock musicians in Mexico

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<sup>59</sup> Olvera and her staff derived this sampling through conversations with staff from venues (El Circo Volador, El Under, and El Multiforo Alicia), as well as staff from radio stations (Reactor and Ibero) – these are some of the same sources I draw from in my research (Olvera 2007: 7).

(and worldwide) have signed with large, transnational record labels, the sound that characterizes their music is still described as “el sonido indie,” while only those bands that have not signed with a transnational record label are called “independiente” in Mexico (personal interviews 2010-2011). For many long-time Mexican rock fans, Mexican indie rock is distasteful because it strays far from *rock en español* and *guacarock* in its attempts to replicate and compete with indie rock from the US, UK, and Canada (ibid.). Additionally, for many “El indie es como el nuevo pop” (“Indie is like the new pop”) (personal interview 2010).

No longer making rock Mexican, that is, adapting it and hybridizing it from its “original” (rhythm and blues derived US iteration) into a locally and regionally particular brand of music that resonates with Mexican youth because it *sounds* like their everyday lived experiences (lyrically and sonically), Mexico’s indie rock is imitative and, according to many fans and rock music professionals, regressive (personal interviews 2010-2011). Indeed, many Mexican indie rock bands sing in English – something anathema to both *rock en español* and *guacarock*. Referring to this new trend, José Manuel of the band La Barranca laments:

Ahora te encuentras con músicos mexicanos que parecieran vivir no sólo en otro país, sino en otro planeta, porque sus letras no reflejan lo que viven... me parece una etapa que ya habíamos superado, y cuando no conoces tu historia estás condenado a repetirla (quoted in Jáuregui 2010).

Now you find Mexican musicians who not only appear to live in another country, but on another planet, because their lyrics don’t reflect what they live... I thought it was a phase we had already overcome, but when you don’t know your history you’re condemned to repeat it.

Today’s young musicians defend the trend. Having grown up during a period when globalization was celebrated and a great deal of English language music was available, they contend that singing in English feels natural (Kun 2007). Armando David of the band Chikita Violenta explains this connection: “We’re most comfortable singing and writing in English.... We’re proud of being from Mexico, but this is the way we like to do music” (quoted in Kun 2007). Chikita Violenta is one of the few bands recognized by interviewees

as being able to effectively compose and sing in English (personal interviews 2010-2011), so their comfort with the language should, perhaps, not be surprising. However, the vast majority of English-singing Mexican rock bands are not as effective. One famous artist and producer described the perplexing nature of this trend, as follows:

Aquí, hay muchos grupos de la ciudad que hablan en inglés que te das cuenta en seguida que están pronunciando mal. Y no solamente eso, es el contenido que... es todavía más vacío de lo que el intentar cantar inglés resulta. ¿Por qué? Yo no sé (personal interview 2011).

Here, there are many groups in the city that speak in English and you notice right away that they are pronouncing it badly. But it's not just that, it's the content ... it's even more empty than simply signing in English would be. Why? I don't know.

The ubiquity of this trend belies the fact that the two most successful indie rock bands in Mexico today are, arguably, Zoé and Austin TV, the former sings in Spanish and the latter is an instrumental band whose members remain anonymous by performing in masks and costumes.

Another feature that distinguishes contemporary Mexican rock from previous iterations is that it appears to be apolitical, rarely referring explicitly to national political issues or consciousness raising. One music industry professional commented that many of today's popular rock musicians sing “canciones para adolescentes, románticas” (“songs for adolescents, romantic songs”) (personal interview 2010). He went on to say:

Hello Seahorse!, Austin TV, son más bien niños tímidos, existencialistas, y sus canciones son equivalente a KidRobot, no, así como juguetitos lindos, color pastel, al ladito sonrientes ... pero al ladito sonrientes son lo más lejano a la politización (ibid.).

Hello Seahorse!, Austin TV,<sup>60</sup> are more like timid children, existentialists, and their songs are equivalent to KidRobot,<sup>61</sup> no, just like pretty toys, pastel colors, smiling alongside [one another]... but smiling alongside [one another] is the furthest thing from politicization.

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<sup>60</sup> Two alternative pop/indie rock bands from Mexico City who have achieved international success, in part by blending into global indie/pop/rock trends.

<sup>61</sup> KidRobot is a line of designer cartoon-like stuffed animal toys imported mostly from Japan and Hong Kong.

Another industry professional called the music “happy, sappy, people in love kind of folk” (personal interview 2010). There is a sense that protest has moved away from music, that “ya son contados” (“there are now very few”) groups that include politics in their projects (personal interview 2010). One interviewee (also an industry professional) suggested that today’s music is more hedonistic, preferring to talk more about glamour, kitsch, and romance than politics. Using the example of Nortec Collective’s song, “Tijuana Makes Me Happy,” he explained:

El caso más extraño es Nortec... Están en Tijuana, que es una zona hiperconflictiva, con muchísimas historias que contar, y ellos deciden no poner letras a sus canciones y cuando las ponen dicen, “Tijuana makes me happy.” Y la letra dice, “Some people call it the nastiest place on earth but I think it’s a lovely place” – algo así. Eso es todo lo que dicen (personal interview 2010).<sup>62</sup>

The case of Nortec is the strangest... They’re in Tijuana, a hyper-conflicted area, with a ton of stories to tell, and they decide to not write lyrics for their songs and when they do they say, “Tijuana makes me happy.” And the lyrics say, “Some people call it the nastiest place on earth but I think it’s a lovely place” – something like that. That’s all they say.

Ironically, artists like Bostich and Fussible, the two principles of Nortec Collective, contend that their work is political. In a 2010 article, they refer to the same song referenced above and point out the song’s melancholic undertones, its “pasajes oscuros y tristes” (“dark and sad passages”) and how these are meant to evoke Tijuana (quoted in Lara 2010: 29). They explain that they intentionally made the few lyrics sound “child like” because they wanted to obscure their reference to an essay also titled, “Tijuana Makes Me Happy,” which offers a sociopolitical critique of the waves of violence in Tijuana and of the government (ibid.).

This kind of hidden politics is occasionally embedded by musicians, though it is difficult to ascertain as a casual or even devoted listener. In an interview with National Public Radio, the LA-based, Monterrey-born band Kinky explained that their music is

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<sup>62</sup> The lyric says, “Some people call it the happiest place on earth/others say it’s a dangerous place/it has been the city of sin/but you know I don’t care.” This lyric is sung in English, which further distances it from a primarily monolingual, Spanish speaking Mexican audience.

inspired by their lives in Mexico (Martin 2009). Meanwhile, a locally successful, Mexico City hard-rock band interviewed by this author said they hide political sentiments in their songs, but admitted that fans interpret the songs differently (personal interviews 2010). This same band explained, that there is widespread “hartazgo,” a sense of being satiated,<sup>63</sup> fed-up with the status quo, but also with government. One band member told this author: “Yo creo que por el hartazgo que uno tiene – ya ni ganas de hablar de eso” (“I think it’s because of the *hartazgo* that people feel – no one feels like talking about it”). Another said, “Tal vez las bandas ya no somos tan clavadas en un dialogo asi, como, ‘Eh, vamos contra la sistema’ tampoco” (“Maybe the bands aren’t so stuck to a dialogue like that anymore, like, ‘Hey, we’re against the system’”). Another musician argued, “No tenemos que poner una bandera de nada para que cierto grupo de personas nos siga” (“We don’t need to put up a particular flag so that a certain group of people will follow us”) (personal interviews 2010). Both rock music fans and musicians are very aware of Mexico’s political and economic situation, it is lived everyday and felt deeply. One interviewee, an anthropologist and expert on youth culture commented:

Aca *se respira* violencia y es bien difícil hablar de lo mismo también en una canción. Hay una alta creatividad en términos de lo pastiche musicales en si mismos, por ejemplo; como mezclan los sonidos. Pero nos cuesta mucho trabajo decir lo mismo que escupimos diariamente (personal interview 2010).

Here we *breathe* violence and it’s really hard to talk about the same thing in a song. There’s a high level of creativity in terms of musical pastiche, for example; how sounds are mixed. But it is a lot of work for us to say the same thing that we cough up everyday.

Thus, Mexico’s rock music has departed from the overtly political, Spanish-only, *ranchera* and *tropicalia*-inspired legacy of *guacarock* and *rock en español*. The tales of everyday life that formed the vibrant heart of Maldita Vecindad’s legendary album, *El Cirvo*, are left out of

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<sup>63</sup> The second definition offered by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary for satiety closely describes the meaning of “hartazgo,” “the revulsion or disgust caused by overindulgence or excess” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2011).

songs as artists and fans alike grow tired of an increasingly violent society where underemployment, unemployment, few educational opportunities, and little chance of upward mobility have become the entrenched reality of the twenty-first century. Indeed, as Mexico celebrated its national independence bicentennial concurrently with the 100-year anniversary of its Revolution in September 2010, one rocker noted:

Celebramos la Independencia y la Revolución, pero no hay mucho que festejar porque dependemos económicamente de otros países. Por otra parte, la Revolución fue una irrupción muy violenta que pretendía cambiar las condiciones del país, pero sólo cambiaron los personajes que están arriba, pues la oligarquía, la desigualdad y el control del poder siguen estando como en tiempos de Don Porfirio (Jáuregui 2010).

We're celebrating Independence and the Revolution, but there's not much to celebrate because we're economically dependent on other countries. On the other hand, the Revolution was a very violent irruption that pretended to change the conditions of the country, but it only changed the people who are on top, so the oligarchy, the inequality and control of power are still the same as in the times of Don Porfirio.

Responding to this situation, today's Mexican rock has turned away from overt references to the national political situation and has fragmented, reflecting the many niche audiences, taste cultures, and fan bases that exist in the country. This fragmentation has led to a proliferation of bands, many of which are described as "indie," "imitative," caught up in global musical trends (dominated by English language, Anglo rock), and lacking any political edge. But today's Mexican rock is said to be utilized as an escape from the *hatazgo* of daily life, and a means of unburdening oneself (*desabogándose*). Unlike the stagnant situation described by the *rockero* in the quote above, however, much *has* changed in Mexico since the Revolution, especially in terms of communication technology, and, in Mexico's case, freedom of speech in the mass media. These two things have greatly influenced today's rock music. The following section turns its focus toward these changes.

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that in Mexico the waning of *rock en español*, the fragmentation of rock music into myriad subgenres, and the rise of English language rock music have all taken place during a period of dramatic opening in the mass media. While the previous chapter described how increased acceptance of rock on the part of the PRI created space for *rock en español*'s remarkable success, it would seem that the end of the government-media couplet has changed the media landscape in such a way as to prevent the flourishing of any one genre or taste culture. Additionally, developments in communication technology have altered processes of music production, distribution, and consumption and have deeply impacted the music industry, as well as music fans.

As explained in the previous chapters, while Mexico's mass media had started to open up during the early 1990s, the media changed notably in 1997 with the death of mogul and Televisa founder Emilio Azcárraga Milmo. He was succeeded by his son Emilio Azcárraga Jean, who saw a decidedly different role for the media giant than his father had. As noted in chapter five, the elder Azcárraga saw Televisa as an arm of the PRI and was committed to making his media empire work for the dominant party. Upon taking the helm, however, the younger Azcárraga declared:

I'm not a politician.... Furthermore, I don't believe that having a good relationship with political figures will benefit us in terms of what matters. I believe in ratings. I don't think that having a good or bad relationship with the minister of the interior is going to change my ratings, which in the end is what I care about – getting the best ratings possible.... I don't mix ideology with programming (quoted in Lawson 2004: 390).

Openly facing rival network TV Azteca, which became a private enterprise in 1993, competition has become central to both media conglomerates: "With the advent of TV

Azteca, programming has become the basis on which competition is conducted, and quality, in the broadest sense, has become an issue” (Sinclair 1999: 49).

A consequence of competition both on television and in print has been broader, more complete coverage of news and current and cultural events – each network and periodical is eager to scoop a story and take credit for keeping citizens informed and entertained. Media opening and a growing civil sphere have proved mutually beneficial.

Describing the late 1990s, political scientist Chappell H. Lawson explains:

An increasingly vibrant civil society provided the readership base for independent publications, but independent publications also helped new social movements gain recognition and shaped their identity and strategies. In this sense, Mexico’s nascent Fourth Estate played a decisive role in creating an autonomous public sphere in which intellectuals, activists, and representatives of the political opposition could debate political and social issues. The ultimate result of this interaction was a new civic discourse in the print media that eventually pervaded the rest of the political establishment (Lawson 2004: 393).

Indeed in 2000, the president of Televisa went so far as to declare that “democracy is very good business” (Levy et al. 2006: 118). Political scandals have also proved fruitful for the mass media (even if they have become overwhelming to the public). Many topics considered off limits during the PRI regime – “drug trafficking, official corruption, electoral fraud, and government repression” – are now regular topics in the press, on the radio, and on television (Lawson 2004: 395). Furthermore, as of 2000, media coverage of electoral politics has become balanced and “remarkably equitable” (ibid.: 397). Finally, survey data reveal that this coverage has had a strong impact on public opinion of the fairness of elections in the post-PRI era (ibid.: 396).

With the mass media opening in ways not seen before, the many varieties of Mexico’s popular rock music are no longer focused on creating space for themselves (as rock was in the 1980s). Nor are they finding increasing numbers of outlets where they can present themselves (as happened in the late 1980s and throughout much of the 1990s). Instead, the

radio stations and television music shows that emerged in the “golden age” discussed in the previous chapter remain the principle means through which today’s rock music circulates. The IMER (Instituto Mexicano del Radio, or Mexican Radio Institute) operates a number of radio stations throughout the country that cater to rock and youth taste cultures (IMER 2011). In Mexico City, for example, there are two radio stations where rock of various subgenres can be heard – Reactor 105.9 and Ibero 90.9. In interviews, the former seems to be the more well respected and established station, while the latter is considered slightly more experimental and with potential for growth (personal interviews 2010-2011).

Despite the stagnation in Mexico’s rock radio programming since the 1990s, a number of interviewees including musicians, fans, and industry insiders make it clear that radio remains a central tool for rock’s diffusion (personal interviews 2010-2011). Speaking of the recent past and then concluding that it remains true now, one musician commented, “La comunidad no está acostumbrada, o no estaba tan acostumbrada escuchar algo que no estuviera en el radio o en la tele, que eso es lo que a la gente le importaba” (“The community isn’t used to, wasn’t so used to, listening to something that wasn’t on the radio or on TV, that’s what was important to people”) (personal interview 2011). According to a veteran rock musician, it is still important to get on the radio, because that is where you can define yourself and figure out if you are popular or not (personal interview 2011).

Though radio remains “super importante,” the Internet has in some ways supplanted television for rock music fans, as many people turn toward growing online media and away from what are seen as the pop-oriented, hyper-commercialized offerings of both Televisa and TV Azteca (personal interviews 2010-2011). In fact, one veteran rocker commented that today’s musicians do not have to use Televisa – or other television channels that are not consistent with the musicians’ point of view – to promote themselves. Today musicians use

the Internet to reach their fans, and fans utilize the Internet to find out about their favorite bands but also to learn about new music (personal interviews 2010-2011). As one *rockero* explained, “Con el Twitter y con el Facebook, es más así como el ‘word of mouth’ pero no en las tocasas sino en Internet” (“With Twitter and Facebook, it’s like ‘word of mouth’ but not at the shows but through the Internet”). Record labels, radio stations, and even festivals are also trying to take advantage of social networking. An article written just before Vive Latino 2011 declared it to be “Un Vive Latino Muy Social” because festival organizers encouraged attendees to participate via an online portal and use Twitter and Facebook to chronicle their experiences and communicate with organizers as well as their favorite bands. In turn, many bands actively engaged with fans through the portal, Twitter, and Facebook (Paz 2011). Additionally, festival organizers in collaboration with Coca Cola, one of the events’ sponsors, “broadcast” live-feed video and interviews with performers via the coca-cola.tv website (Barquera 2011), thus expanding the audience well-beyond those present at El Foro Sol.

The Internet is not just being used for social networking and communication, it is also being used as a tool for distributing music quickly and efficiently. This, together with breakthroughs in communication technologies that make music production and editing accessible to anyone with a little skill, a computer, and some relatively easy-to-use software, has dramatically democratized the world of music. As the music industry struggles in terms of how to keep pace with the digitization of music, do-it-yourself, amateur musicians and aspiring stars are taking matters into their own hands. In Mexico, independent production and indie rock have ascended while transnational record labels have lost some of their power and signing with a label has lost much of its cachet (personal interviews 2010-2011). As one veteran rocker summed up the general sentiment:

El crecimiento del indie ha sido directamente proporcional al decrecimiento de la industria de compañías transnacionales.... Mientras estas compañías han ido haciéndose cada vez más pequeñas en el sentido de las ventas... eso ha hecho que estas mismas compañías no apuesten por proyectos arriesgados, como son proyectos más alternativos o de rock ... y están buscando realmente nada más rescatar el barco que está hundiendo, no. Entonces van a lo seguro y entonces esta combinación con el uso de toda la tecnología también - para registrar, para grabar - que ya no necesitas una disquera para hacer un proyecto.... Si compongo una canción ahorita, al rato se graba y en la noche ya está en Tailandia. Eso era imposible, impensable antes. Dependías de una compañía o de algunas compañías tal vez más independientes o nacionales o menores.... Ha sido una cuestión de supervivencia (personal interview 2011).

The growth of indie has been in direct proportion to the decline of transnational labels.... As these company's have been getting smaller and smaller in terms of sales... it has meant that these same companies don't invest in riskier projects, like alternative projects, or rock... and they are really only looking for ways to save the sinking ship. So they go with the sure bets and this combination with the use of all the new technology as well - for copyright, for recording - means that you don't need a record label to do a project.... If I compose something right now, in a little while I can record it and tonight it's in Thailand. This was impossible, unthinkable before. Before you depended on a company, or on a few companies that were maybe more independent or domestic or smaller.... It has been a question of survival.

Because the transnational record labels are struggling, many small, domestic labels (for example, Intolerancia, Noiselab, and Terrícolas Imbéciles) have stepped up to support bands in lieu of the transnationals or in certain aspects of the business, taking control of distribution, promotion, or production - whatever each band or artist requires (personal interviews 2010-2011).

The combination of Mexico's media opening, rock music's stable place as *part* of the national music landscape, and dramatic changes in the ability to create, produce, distribute, and consume music thanks to the combination of digitization and the Internet has meant an equally dramatic increase in the amount of music that is available. So much music is available, so many blogs and websites catalog and discuss it, that, ironically, it has become challenging to *find* music: "Ya está saturado también. O sea, es tanta la información que hay a la mano que [es abrumadora]" ("But now it's saturated too. That is, there is so much information at your finger tips [it's overwhelming]") (personal interview 2011). One

musician commented that there are so many groups now, that it is hard to distinguish them from one another, while several fans stated that they tend to listen to the same bands that they have liked for some time because it is just too difficult to weed through the monotony (thus partly explaining the excitement surrounding Caifanes' performance at the 2011 Vive Latino). Another fan explained: "hay grupos que siento que ya nada más son copias, no tienen originalidad" ("there are groups that I think are just copies, they don't have any originality") (personal interviews 2011). As compared with previous periods when there were not a lot of bands and few spaces where rock music could be heard, today there are so many bands, many of which, according to most interviewees, "no valen la pena" ("aren't worth it"), that the rock music scene appears to have lost its innovation and creativity. Additionally, the fragmentation of the scene has driven fans and musicians further and further into niches that websites and blogs capitalize on and reinforce.

## Conclusion

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Mexico's media have continued to open up, creating space for more and diverse voices in the press, on the radio, on television, and, most notably, online. In terms of national politics this has meant that coverage of politicians, political parties, elections, and the government in general is freer and fairer. In terms of popular music and rock music in particular, it has meant that rock has maintained its small but important place in the national media landscape. Changes in communication technology and the centrality of the Internet have impacted people throughout the world and Mexico is no exception. The number of people and bands participating in Mexico's rock music scene has increased exponentially because of these changes, while fragmentation has divided the scene into so many subgenres and niches that any holistic or collective feeling the scene once had, no longer exists.

It remains to be seen what impact trends such as indie rock and English-language composition will have in the long term. What is clear is that there has been a shift away from the inward-looking, Mexico-focused *rock en español* and *guacarock* of the 1980s and 1990s. Now, rock musicians and fans are oriented more toward international music trends (in terms of production, distribution, *and* sound) and, depending on one's perspective, either compete for a share of the international market, or imitate other artists for a share of this market. Yet, as one musician reminded this author, “la gente está buscando sentirse bien... otro estado de animo, otro lugar que realmente no te haga pensar en toda la desgracia que existe” (“people are looking for a way to make themselves feel good... another mood, another place that doesn't make you think about all the misfortune that exists”) (personal interview 2011). So somehow, through it all, musicians, fans, and industry professionals seem to agree that rock remains marginalized in Mexico; it maintains its reputation (or, rather, its potential) as rebellious, resistant, anti-establishment, contestatory, and a space where youth can flee the *hatazgo* of life, to *desahogarse* and escape.

## Chapter VII

### Findings: Mexican Rock, Youth, Politics, and the State

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So far this dissertation has examined Mexican rock music and its relationship with youth, politics, and the state from the early 1980s to the present. The previous three chapters (chapters four, five, and six) described the political, economic, and social contexts in which Mexico's rock music has been embedded. Each chapter focused on life in Mexico, generally and for youth in particular in an effort to reveal the connections between young people, their lived experiences, and the rock music that has accompanied them in their daily lives. This dissertation has also explained the important role that the mass media have played in the trajectory of Mexico's rock music over the last three decades. While the mass media were initially an obstacle to be overcome for young rock music fans and musicians, by the 1990s the media actively provided space for the burgeoning music. Today, the mass media, including the music industry and the Internet, are fertile grounds for the large and diverse scene broadly referred to as Mexican "rock."

The three preceding chapters provided an historical overview of Mexican rock music, drawn from many years of research and data accumulation ranging from extensive literature reviews (academic and popular), thirty-four face-to-face interviews, and frequent participant observation. While this overview was neither exhaustive nor encyclopedic, it is the first attempt in popular or academic literature (in English or in Spanish) to examine Mexico's rock music from the time that it re-emerged in the 1980s – following a period of overt government repression – to the present. Having, therefore, accomplished one goal of this dissertation, the present chapter turns to the unique findings that this historical overview and its accompanying research data have generated. The first set of findings, discussed in the

section, “Two Trajectories in Sync,” offers an amendment to extant literature on Mexican rock music by showing how the trajectories of Mexican society and Mexican rock have paralleled one another over the past thirty years. Related to this finding, this dissertation argues that Mexican society and Mexican rock music are both experiencing an identity crisis and utilizes global media studies theory to discuss the implications of these crises.

The second set of findings, described in the section, “Media, Technology, Internationalization, and the Dilution of Mexican Rock,” reveals how freer mass media in Mexico and changes in communication technologies have combined to: 1) aid the proliferation of Mexican rock music; 2) fragment and divide Mexican rock music into almost limitless subgenres and taste cultures; 3) facilitate Mexican rock music’s participation in a global music marketplace; and 4) dilute Mexican rock music to the point that it now appears decentered, rudderless, and stripped of any kind of political capacity. The relationship between the media and Mexican rock music is explored using media and communication theory.

The third and final set of findings presented in the section, “Finding the Political in Mexican Rock,” engages prominent accounts of Mexico’s rock music and interrogates common assumptions about the relationship between Mexican rock, youth, politics, and the state. This dissertation contends that these relationships have always been more complicated than previous research indicates. Additionally, this section argues that in the thirty years examined in this dissertation the state has only ever been consistently *ambivalent* toward rock music. This section utilizes the contributions of popular music scholars and anthropologist Clifford Geertz to explain how Mexico’s rock music has had different uses at different times, but that it is an important cultural phenomenon utilized by social actors to represent their world. The section concludes with an acknowledgement that musicians and fans maintain a

belief in rock's potential as a political tool and means of expression and/or engagement for Mexico's youth, thus underscoring rock music's varied uses and meanings.

### Two Trajectories in Sync

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Beginning in chapter four with the description of the re-birth of homegrown Mexican rock, this dissertation has revealed distinct parallels between the trajectory of Mexican society and that of Mexico's rock music. This section briefly highlights this parallel as it was discussed in chapters four through six, summarizing the trends effecting Mexican society and Mexican rock, in turn, for each of the three phases. It then examines the significance of this finding and its relationship with theory and literature on Mexican rock. Next, a related finding is discussed: both Mexican society and Mexico's rock music are currently experiencing an identity crisis that has left them unmoored and with an uncertain future.

During the first phase of contemporary Mexican rock, described in chapter four as the re-birth of homegrown rock, Mexico was wracked by political and economic crises that contributed to the destabilization of the semi-authoritarian PRI party, which had controlled the government for decades. The 1980s, which became known as the "lost decade," were also marked by a massive earthquake that devastated Mexico City and its surrounding areas in 1985 and underscored the PRI government's inefficiency, ineptitude, and its unrelenting, laser-like focus on self-preservation. The 1982 peso devaluation and the 1985 earthquake awoke a civil sphere so dissatisfied with and disillusioned by government that it began to take matters into its own hands, enlivening a spirit of civic engagement not seen in Mexico for many years. This activity changed the lives of those who actively participated, while it

also demonstrated the constructive power of grassroots organization and its ability to create a social safety net separate and distinct from government and the ruling party.

Many of the young people who experienced the lost decade and the awakening of the civil sphere were galvanized by what they witnessed. Just as citizens began to give up on the state and were internalizing the fact that the Revolutionary promises that the modern Mexican nation and the PRI had been founded on (redistribution of wealth, land reform, national unity, and an end to pervasive foreign involvement) were no closer to coming to fruition than they had been in the 1930s, young people latched on to a popular cultural form of youth expression and rebellion: rock music. They began utilizing rock music, which had been thoroughly repressed and pushed underground by the government and government-controlled media throughout the 1970s, as a means through which to assert themselves and carve out a space for themselves within Mexican society. Rock was taken up as a tool with which young people sought out and formed an identity distinct from the status quo while also declaring their independence and difference from the PRI-ordained role for youth. In their effort to be heard and recognized, rock musicians and rock's young fans created "*guacarock*," a deliberate and proud blend of Mexican musical traditions and Anglo rock which utilized Spanish language lyrics that were understood by and relevant to local, Mexican audiences. Thus, Mexican rock musicians and fans made rock their own and the music and its growing popularity confounded an ailing PRI that had worked diligently to control and repress youth cultural expression for more than a decade. Rock's re-birth combined with the rise of Mexico's increasingly disgruntled civil sphere would mark the beginning of the end for the PRI and Mexico's long history of centralized, corporatist, semi-authoritarianism.

During the second phase of contemporary Mexican rock, described in chapter five as the consolidation of rock, the increasingly maligned PRI faced a crisis of legitimacy and credibility. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, political scandal and additional economic crises destabilized the state, eventually prompting it to fully adopt neoliberal economic strategies that reversed decades of nationalistic, protectionist policies. The PRI barely maintained its grip on power by blatantly rigging the 1988 presidential elections, an action that would further undermine its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of Mexico's citizens. Another economic crisis in 1994, coupled with the rise of the Zapatista indigenous guerrilla movement in the Southern state of Chiapas that same year, reminded everyone of the limits of neoliberal economic reform. At the same time, these developments reinforced the need for active civic participation and prompted many people to engage in struggles for human rights and to continue the strong election monitoring that had begun in the late 1980s.

As international lenders and trading partners focused their attention on Mexico, the PRI loosened its grip on cultural production and distribution. Rock musicians and fans took advantage of increased internationalization and the PRI's waning control of the culture industries to insinuate rock music onto television and radio stations throughout the country. The *rock en español* that characterized Mexican rock of the late 1980s and 1990s followed in the footsteps of *gnacarock* with its Spanish language lyrics and celebration of Mexico's cultural roots. In addition, Mexico's *rock en español* tapped into the growing popularity of Spanish language rock emerging from Spain and South America to produce its own variation of the innovative rock music genre. Young rock musicians from diverse backgrounds chronicled daily life in Mexico, their efforts resonated with people throughout the country, and their popularity increased exponentially during this "boom" time. In addition, these artists openly

resisted the Mexican government's increasingly outward orientation by focusing their attention inward, declaring "de aquí somos" ("we are from here") (personal interview 2011).

In the third phase of Mexican rock, described in chapter six as a period of paradox, saturation, and fragmentation, the tendency toward internationalization and the use of neoliberal economic strategies continued even after the PRI's semi-authoritarian reign ended and Mexico transitioned to a young, fragile democracy. The civil sphere that had awakened in the mid-1980s and was strengthened throughout the 1990s, eventually proved triumphant when the PRI lost its majority in Congress in 1997 and the presidency in 2000. This democratization, which was driven by a "push from below" (Levy et al. 2006: 68), reflected the effectiveness of grassroots mobilization and increased election oversight. With the election of Felipe Calderón in 2006, Mexico continued to consolidate its democracy. Today's Mexican government has thoroughly re-oriented itself away from the nationalistic ideals that dominated governance from the 1930s until the mid-1980s. As economic historian, Jorge Castañeda writes, "El PRI salió de Los Pinos pero no del alma de México" ("The PRI left Los Pinos [presidential residence] but not the soul of Mexico") (Castañeda 2009). So, while an active citizenry proved essential to Mexico's democratization, with the fall of the PRI, civil society seems to have lost its grounding and much of its motivation, but decades of PRI indoctrination have been difficult to unloose.

Mexico's political and economic opening to foreign markets and influence (most notably from the mid-1980s to the present) has created a value around globalization and internationalization that has in many ways replaced the prideful, nationalism that characterized PRI rule; and this trend is seen acutely in current popular rock music.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>64</sup> Jorge Castañeda, economic historian and former Mexican politician, attributes this value to migratory flows to and from the United States. As of 2008 there were 12.6 million Mexicans living in the United States and two out of five Mexicans in Mexico have family in the US (Castañeda 2011: 242; 164).

inward looking celebration of Mexican roots which *guacarock* and *rock en español* invigorated is largely absent from today's Mexican rock. While the genre has become abundant, it is also fragmented and divided into myriad niche sub-genres. The two trends that best exemplify this tendency are English language lyrics and the indie rock sound, both of which indicate Mexico's participation in an internationalizing, global popular music market.

What this summary has made clear is that today's Mexican rock parallels the unsettled, uncertain situation of today's Mexican society as much as Mexican rock of the 1980s and 1990s paralleled society's dissatisfaction and disillusionment with government. This finding is significant because it reveals something that has not been discussed in the literature on contemporary Mexican rock music. Part of what makes this finding important is the extended period of time it examines. Many studies of Mexican rock have been snapshots, looking at a handful of years and the significance of rock during that time (Martínez 1992; Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998; Anaya 1999; Analco and Zetina 2000). This finding is also important because it looks at popular rock, generally, from the 1980s to the present, rather than focusing attention on a particular subgenre and its accompanying taste culture. For example, many analyses of youth identity have limited themselves to punk, dark/goth, ska, emo, or hip hop subcultures (Anaya 1999; Analco and Zetina 2000; Gaytán Santiago 2001; Castillo Berthier 2005; Nateras Dominguez 2005; Marcial 2010). These accounts shed light on relatively small groups of young people and their music tastes rather than illuminating the more generally relevant relationship between rock and youth (both understood broadly) to Mexican society. Finally, this finding is especially useful because its scope is panoramic and examines economic, political, social, *and* cultural vectors. Therefore, this study more fully illuminates the complex, nuanced, and intimate relationship between Mexican rock as a

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Castañeda notes that "opening up to the 'rest of the world' was another Mexican euphemism; it meant opening up to the neighbor to the north" (ibid.: 157).

popular culture form, youth expression, and the state. Other studies have included multiple dimensions in their examination of Mexican rock but have not pointed out the way the genre has paralleled the trajectory of Mexican society. (For example Urteaga Castro-Pozo 1998; Torres Medina 2002; and Woodside Woods 2010 have, respectively, focused on punk culture/identity in an urban landscape; eroticism in Mexican rock; and music as an historical document that forms part of the identity and memory of a community).

### *Identity Crises*

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This evident parallel serves as important context for a related finding: Mexico and its rock music are currently experiencing concurrent identity crises. Chapter three described how the state utilized mass media and popular culture to develop a unified, coherent sense of what it meant to be Mexican and what the values and traditions of Mexico were. For example, it employed *ranchera* music to convey an image of “bravery, pride, [and] integrity” (Jáuregui 2007: 72) and *bolero* to convey a complementary image of Mexico as urban, modern, edgy, provocative, and forward-looking. In the mid-1980s as the state struggled amid economic and political turmoil, not only did it begin to lose its ability to manage national identity and popular culture (due to its weakening control over the culture industries), it also lost its legitimacy as the weaver of national myth. During this period, rock music re-emerged and, much like it had in the 1960s (see chapter three), began challenging what it meant to be Mexican. By the late 1980s, bands like Caifanes, Maldita Vecindad, and Café Tacuba described what life was like in Mexico and collectively articulated a very different sense of the national than *ranchera* and *bolero* had. Rock helped take the process of defining the nation out of the hands of the PRI and created a sense that it was permissible to critique the nation and the government while still celebrating its indigenous roots, its musical

traditions, and its creativity (exemplified by the way it hybridized Anglo-rock and transformed it into an innovative, musically distinct, and lyrically original popular culture form).

But today both the nation and its rock music are facing an identity crisis. Chapter six explained how the 2000 and 2006 elections showed that Mexico has entered a fragile democracy. But democracy has not translated into economic prosperity or domestic tranquility, nor has it meant improved distribution of wealth or access to resources. As social commentator and political scientist Jorge Castañeda explained in 2009:

Nueve años después, la democracia parece una diva a la que se le terminaron los trucos. El puro libreto de la democracia, por naturaleza discordante, no basta para darle al país la narrativa de futuro que necesita.... Es la hora del desencanto con la democracia por sus pobres resultados (Castañeda 2009).

Nine years later, democracy appears to be a diva that has run out of tricks. The pure libretto of democracy, by nature discordant, is not sufficient to give the country the narrative of the future that it needs.... It is the hour of discontentment with democracy because of its poor results.

Mexico today finds itself increasingly dependent on foreign governments that serve as trading partners and investors,<sup>65</sup> while it simultaneously faces mounting drug-related violence and a young population with little opportunity for educational or occupational advancement. During the September 2010 celebrations of the bicentennial of Mexico's independence and the centennial of its Revolution, newspaper headlines declared: "Independencia sin libertad" ("Independence without freedom") (Garduño Morán 2010) and "¿Qué tenemos que celebrar?" ("What do we have to celebrate?") (Regino Montes 2010). Meanwhile, just before the official celebrations were to take place, "El Infierno" ("Hell"), a dark, provocative comedy about the money, politics, and insidious cycles of violence that surround Mexico's drug trade, was released (thanks in part to considerable government funding). Writing about the film, one journalist recounted:

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<sup>65</sup> In this respect, Mexico's current circumstances parallel the position it was in in the lead up to the 1910 Revolution.

It gets under the skin. Throughout a screening on Sunday night at a cineplex in downtown Mexico City, as the characters in “El Infierno” descended into an out-of-control cycle of violence and bloodshed, the audience couldn’t stop laughing. The laughter was genuine but uneasy. “El Infierno” is a fictional depiction of a real-life drama that engulfs Mexico day after day, a drama over which the average Mexican feels little control (Hernandez 2010).

The film’s advertisements and posters, seen all over Mexico for many weeks, included a bullet-riddled sign modeled after a road sign, declaring Mexico “Nada que celebrar” (“Nothing to celebrate”).

And while the nation is gripped with this uneasy situation, today’s Mexican rock music is similarly unmoored, reflecting uncertainty and confusion rather than providing answers, solutions, or even commentary. As chapter six explained, the fragmentation of the rock music scene into myriad subgenres, the prevalence of English language composition in much of Mexico’s popular rock, and the ubiquity of the indie sound all demonstrate a movement away from the Mexican roots celebrated in *guacarock* and *rock en español*. Additionally, as the genre splinters, it has become impossible to locate a center from which any kind of discourse can emanate. While there have always been subgenres within Mexican rock, *guacarock* and *rock en español* became the central, rallying points for the popular culture movement of Mexican rock in the 1980s and 1990s (personal interviews 2010-2011). Now, without a center around which to gather and without a distinct enemy (which the PRI proved to be) against which to position itself, Mexican rock appears lost and imitative. And, as described in chapter six, some of its listeners are becoming nostalgic while others are accused of having forgotten the history of the genre and what it once stood for.

The finding that contemporary Mexico is experiencing an identity crisis is neither surprising nor groundbreaking. Instead, it is consistent with recent social commentary and accounts in the popular press, particularly newspapers and socio-politically oriented magazines like *Proceso* and *Nexos* (for scholarly discussions of this topic see Castañeda 2009,

2011; Servín 2010; Chorba 2010). Arguing that Mexican rock music is experiencing an identity crisis is new to academic literature simply because scant attention is paid to the topic and it is so contemporary. Still, the argument would not surprise musicians, fans, or music industry professionals who, in interviews with this author, repeatedly expressed confusion about the state of today's Mexican rock. No one this author spoke with is quite sure what is happening in the genre, what direction it is headed, or what worth it currently has (personal interviews 2010-2011).

These crises-in-tandem are not unprecedented in Mexican history. Previous chapters have explained the struggles over how to express *Mexicanidad* through music in the 1920s, the government's role in utilizing popular culture for political ends from the 1930s through the 1960s, and the PRI's efforts to harness rock music to control youth in the 1970s and 1980s. As this dissertation has demonstrated, tensions and processes of negotiation marked each of these periods, and whenever the government experienced a crisis in legitimacy or credibility, its ability to control popular culture (via the mass media) was threatened, thus establishing the intimate links between Mexico's government and its popular culture.

Mexican rock music, then, effectively confirms what historian Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the "hyperreal" status of the nation. That is, Chakrabarty argues that terms like "Europe," "India," and, in this case, "Mexico," are "hyperreal terms in that they refer to certain figures of imagination whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate. As figures of the imaginary they are, of course, subject to contestation..." (Chakrabarty 2000: 27). Or as, Lisa Weedon puts it, "the nation is a contingent category rather than a substantial thing" (quoted in Kraidy 2010: 164). By attempting to redefine the nation in the 1980s and 1990s in ways that differed from the formula prescribed by the PRI, Mexican rock proved that the nation and national identity are both projects, malleable and in process. They

are not unified or fixed and, thus, are subject to both the will of those who govern and the governed.

That both Mexico and Mexican rock are experiencing an identity crisis also confirms anthropologist Nestor García Canclini's argument that the "national cultures" of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (those territorially bound, internally consistent characters that allowed inhabitants to "eat like a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a Brazilian" which "was not only a way of maintaining specific traditions but also an act of reproduction with the commodities generated by one's society") have lost their position as central to identity and identity formation in today's increasingly globalized world (García Canclini 2001: 17; 89).<sup>66</sup> As this dissertation has shown, the PRI was definitively decentered as the sole arbiter of national identity during the political and economic crises of the 1980s. Mexican rock was one place where young people challenged the PRI and demonstrated how "identities [are] processes of *negotiation* inasmuch as they are *hybrid, flexible, and multicultural*" (ibid.: 96). Today's Mexican rock, however, is divided, fragmented, and struggling to find and make clear what its identity (identities?) may be. Today's *rockeros* are confronted with the challenge, as global media studies scholar Marwan Kraidy argues in a different context, of striking "a balance between 'joining the rest of the world' without relinquishing one's distinctiveness" (Kraidy 2010: 203). How youth navigate the relationship between the Mexican "nation," Mexican rock music, "the rest of the world," and the changing nature of communication technologies, internationalization, and global connectivity is the topic of the next section and set of findings.

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<sup>66</sup> Discussion of globalization and increasing transnationalization is included in the following section.

If Mexican rock has helped disrupt the government's control over national identity, developments in communication technology and an increasingly open mass media have helped underscore that the nation has indeed been decentered in the process of identity formation. Indeed, communication scholar Jesús Martín Barbero argues that new communication technologies can create a crisis of identity by changing the foundation upon which national identity rests (Martín-Barbero 1993: 183). As discussed in chapters four through six, the mass media have played an important role in Mexican rock music's trajectory from the 1980s to the present; the media greatly assisted Mexican rock's rise in the 1980s, its dramatic success in the 1990s, and its continued presence through the 2000s. This dissertation has shown that by carving out a presence for itself on the radio and within the music industry (with both small-scale and major record labels), Mexican rock music has reached a large audience and has, in effect, been part of the mainstream since the early to mid 1990s (that is, it is popular, widely available, and present throughout Mexican culture). Chapter six, however, described how major developments in communication technologies over the past ten to fifteen years have combined to dramatically change the nature of contemporary Mexican rock. Specifically, the Internet and do-it-yourself production and distribution technologies have made the creation, proliferation, and consumption of music easier, cheaper, and more convenient than ever before.

This finding is not surprising and is consistent with what is going on with music worldwide (Jones 2010). These developments have opened up Mexico and its popular culture to transnational flows and global markets that media studies scholar Daya Kishan Thussu argues can "contribute to a more cosmopolitan culture, and in the long run perhaps affect national, regional and even international political dynamics" (Thussu 2007: 4). The

popularity of English language composition, the indie rock sound, and the absence of references to Mexico or life therein all show that this opening up has in fact helped change the nature of today's Mexican rock music.

According to Kraidy, increased exposure to and participation in mediated transnational cultural forms presents a paradox for non-Western audiences: "It signals membership in a modern, cosmopolitan, elite" (Kraidy 2010: 7) while raising the specter of homogenization, and, particularly problematic in Mexico's case, Americanization. The current trajectory of Mexican rock as described in this dissertation demonstrates that internationalization (macro-economically and culturally) has led to fragmentation, division, and virtually unlimited subgenre variation. This, in turn, has diluted Mexican rock music. Once experienced and described as a "movement," it is now rudderless, has become apolitical, and has lost its role as a collective medium through which to engage in broad, inclusive social, political, or cultural discourse. Simultaneously, while this dilution is something that worries old guard Mexican *rockeros*, the youngest generation remains unperturbed and eager to increase its participation in the global cultural sphere. Along with the dilution of any political potential, Mexico's rock music has also become more diverse, more cosmopolitan, and more responsive to a wide variety of taste cultures.

García Canclini would argue that trends in contemporary Mexican rock exemplify how globalization is a passage from modern identities (nationally shaped and territorially bound) to postmodern ones (structured less by the state than by international markets) (García Canclini 2001: 29). However, this chapter has already argued, along with Chakrabarty, that the modern nation is not *just* the territorially bound, geopolitical representation, but is also an imagined, contingent, flexible, and malleable identity. Therefore, this dissertation concurs with Kraidy's position that popular culture is a means

through which to see how “modernity comes in multiple and sometimes contradictory forms” (Kraidy 2010: 8). Today’s Mexican rock should be seen as a tool, albeit one that is variously employed, for identity exploration (just as *guacarock* and *rock en español* were) for a generation that is experiencing the modern world in a decidedly different – more integrated, more contingent, more precarious – way than the generations that came before. Therefore, this dissertation’s finding that communication technologies and an increasingly open Mexican mass media have contributed to stripping Mexican rock of some of its political power must be amended to acknowledge that while this is true, Mexican rock’s ability to serve as a means for identity exploration in a complex modernity remains intact and central to its relevance. The question remains, how political was Mexican rock even during its “golden age.” This is the topic of the next section and findings.

#### Finding the Political in Mexican Rock

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This dissertation began with the intent to explore the relationship between Mexican rock music, youth, politics, and the state. Although highly mediated and part of mainstream popular culture since the early to mid-1990s, Mexican rock has been described as an overtly political musical movement that is dissident, rebellious, nonconformist, anti-establishment, and anti-status quo (Urteaga Castro Pozo 1998; Zolov 1999; Castillo Berthier 2004; Marcial 2010). However, in a 2007 *New York Times* article, American studies scholar Josh Kun hinted that this kind of Mexican rock had been effectively replaced by today’s apolitical, English language indie rock (Kun 2007). This section returns to Kun’s observation by describing this dissertation’s finding that characterizations of Mexican rock as the highly political voice of the marginalized are only partially true and largely misrepresent the music, its social role, and how it is (and has been) used by Mexico’s youth.

Historian Eric Zolov writes, “Left to ferment in the barrios, rock music would eventually rear its defiant head once more, only this time in the voice of the truly marginalized” (Zolov 1999: 233). By the time of the student movements of the mid-1980s, Zolov argues, “the question of separating rock from social protest had become moot. . . . Today, the identification between rock music and democratic politics goes almost without question in opposition circles” (ibid.: 257). Zolov is not the only commentator on Mexican social life who perceives a deep connection between rock music, protest, democracy, and the “marginalized.” Well-known Mexican social critic Carlos Monsiváis states, Mexican rock is now the “principal instrument for those who are marginalized in society, the first zone of expression for the under class” (ibid.: 258). Following in this rhetorical vein, Mexican sociologist Héctor Castillo Berthier argues:

Since its beginnings, Mexican rock has connoted rebellion, nonconformity, generational struggles, and the search for new forms of expression. . . . Arguably, the assimilation of Mexican rock has been an osmotic process: From its origins among the middle classes in the 1960s, Mexican rock later spread to the lower sectors of society where it was transformed and converted into a complex and socially committed proposal of youth identity (Castillo Berthier 2004: 259).

Most recently, social scientist Rogelio Marcial claims that rock in Mexico is a “gran movimiento contestataria” (“a great contestatory movement”) (Marcial 2010: 185). In sum, these statements characterize Mexican rock as having a confrontational, rebellious, and defiant nature. Additionally, these writers emphasize rock’s connection with democratization and social protest. Finally, as described here, rock is necessarily (if not exclusively) related to young people and particularly those deemed to be part of the “marginalized,” “under class” of Mexican society.

This dissertation has found that while Mexico’s rock music has at times been confrontational, rebellious, and defiant, this is not uniformly true. Similarly, while rock music has periodically been used in social protest, its relationship to democratization has only ever

been limited and sporadic. For example, chapter four explained that, unlike the characterizations listed above, the principle role of Mexico's homegrown rock of the early 1980s was to carve out a space for youth and youth cultural expression. Young rock musicians and their fans shrugged off images of what it meant to be Mexican (as promoted in *ranchera* and *bolero* music, for example) and embraced a cultural form that had its origins *outside* of Mexico. They took Anglo rock and adapted it to communicate non-conformity with PRI norms and values, and deep pride in *mestizo*, Mexican roots. By utilizing streets, gymnasiums, and other public spaces, they demonstrated that there was little consideration of or concern for youth under the PRI regime. Through rock music, space was created where it was safe and, over time, increasingly acceptable for young people to congregate and publicly engage with one another.

This trend continued into the late 1980s and through the 1990s. Chapter five explained that young people used the spaces that were created (both physically and within the mass media) to critique the government. It was during this phase in the history of Mexican rock that it most closely resembles the characterizations with which this section began. Youth effectively utilized rock music to articulate what life was like in Mexico during a particularly difficult political and economic climate where government was synonymous with the media and both were mired in corruption, graft, scandal, and greed.<sup>67</sup> As explained in chapter five, different bands came to represent different sectors of the population and described Mexican life from these diverse perspectives. Meanwhile, some bands pushed the boundaries of what could be expressed in popular culture (Molotov's "Puto," for example),

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<sup>67</sup> Even during this period, much of Mexico's rock music was concerned with the more quotidian occupations of youth – love and enjoying one's free time. As noted by one scholar of Mexican rock, some of the most resonant songs of the period have nothing to do with politics or social commentary: Café Tacuba's "María," "Noche Oscura," and "El Baile y el Salón" or Molotov's decidedly homophobic ode to machismo, "Puto" (personal correspondence 2012).

and effectively underscored the PRI's weakening position and diminished power. At the same time, rock music fans and musicians aided by their large and growing numbers, held benefit concerts and organized on behalf of social and political causes (for the EZLN's efforts in Chiapas and to support AIDS research, for example).<sup>68</sup>

By the 2000s, however, Mexico's rock appears to have passed the apex of its political expressiveness and its role as a medium for collective youth discourse. As chapter six pointed out, during the first ten years of the new millennium, Mexico's rock music became fragmented and any political expression has become covert, hidden in melodies and intentionally veiled references. The fact that today's Mexican rock is not overtly political reveals that there is nothing inherent in the genre that makes it rebellious, contentious, or non-conformist. In fact, the current trends of English language composition and indie rock demonstrate that Mexican rock can be quite conformist as it blends in with and follows prevalent tendencies in rock worldwide. Additionally, the fact that today's Mexican rock music fans and musicians explain that the music is used as a means of escaping the *hartazgo* (feeling of being fed up) of daily life in Mexico today – with its entrenched government ineffectiveness, widespread and deep alienation from political processes, worsening inequality, and frustrating absence of opportunity – speaks to the multiple uses of Mexican rock music for its listeners. So, while Mexican rock did play a rebellious, dissident role during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, it has not always played that role, and chapter six demonstrated that today it, largely, does not.

Nevertheless, Mexican rock has remained central to “marginalized” youth, as noted in the above characterizations. But rather than being an instrument of “economically

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<sup>68</sup> One historian and rock music scholar pointed out that these efforts became tiresome for many rock music fans who eventually had enough of the political rhetoric and retreated to rock that emphasized *desmadre* (happy chaos in this context), letting loose, and having a good time (personal correspondence 2012).

marginalized” youth, this dissertation has shown that youth as a *social category* are marginalized in Mexico as educational and employment opportunities have been and continue to be scarce across the socio-economic spectrum and while the state (from the PRI to the PAN) continues to perceive youth as a threat. Furthermore, while *guacarock* may have started in the geographic margins of Mexico’s urban centers, the artists and their fans came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>69</sup> From the late 1980s to the present, the mass mediated rock music described in chapters four, five, and six has long had widespread appeal and resonance. Therefore, limiting Mexican rock music’s use and relevance to a particular socio-economic segment incorrectly associates the genre with an ideological position of class struggle that is quite simply absent from the content of the vast majority of popular, mass mediated Mexican rock music, as well as its utilization by fans.<sup>70</sup>

Additionally, accounts that focus on Mexican rock’s position “opposite”<sup>71</sup> the state leave out how rock has paralleled developments in Mexican society and its civil sphere and how Mexican rock has acted as a foil for the state itself, rising in stature as the PRI government was in demise (as was explained in the first section of this chapter). While chroniclers of Mexican rock (such as Zolov, Castillo Berthier, Monsiváis, and Urteaga) correctly describe the antagonistic relationship between the state and youth *rockeros*, they ignore the various ways the state has demonstrated a great deal of ambivalence toward rock since the mid-1980s, sometimes harnessing it for its own purposes, and often indirectly

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<sup>69</sup> One scholar of Mexican rock described in detail the privileged backgrounds of many of Mexico’s most well known dissident rockers (personal correspondence 2011). The father of the lead singer of Botellita de Jerez, Sergio Arau, was a musician and well connected with Mexico’s leading public intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. Meanwhile one member of rebellious band *par excellence*, Molotov, has a brother in one of Mexico’s preeminent pop bands, Fobia.

<sup>70</sup> This is not to say that class struggle and left-leaning ideological positions (or right-leaning ones for that matter) are completely absent from *all* of Mexican rock. Underground music in Mexico does occasionally have fiercely ideological positions, but popular rock music available via the mass media does not evidence this.

<sup>71</sup> The title of one of Castillo Berthier’s essays on Mexican rock is “My Generation: Rock and *la Banda*’s Forced Survival Opposite the Mexican State” (Castillo Berthier 2004).

contributing to its success (through the support of youth-oriented rock radio and increased media opening, for example).

In sum, this dissertation has revealed the following related findings: 1) Mexican rock has only occasionally been used as a tool for political expression among the “truly marginalized,” “under class” of Mexican youth; 2) today’s Mexican rock is apolitical and is used as a means of escape and *desahogo* (release), and 3) the state’s ambivalence toward Mexican rock (particularly that of the PRI in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s) and its sometimes direct, sometimes indirect support of the genre actually *aided* the genre’s growth and exposure.

This dissertation has repeatedly shown that what Mexican rock has meant, what its social role has been, and how it has been used have all changed over time. Still, Mexico’s rock music fans, musicians, and advocates have maintained a belief in its *potential* as a medium for social change (personal interviews 2010-2011). In spite of the fact that they recognize the absence of fiery rhetoric in today’s rock music, interviewees insist that it has the potential to ignite a spark. Fans repeatedly told this author that while today’s Mexican rock does not have political force, they believe that it can, that music is capable of moving people, eliciting feelings, and raising consciousness (ibid.). One musician argued that there is something special about rock – that it will forever carry with it its history of resistance and youth rebellion (ibid.). Another musician expressed his hope that some rockero will come along and respond both to what is happening in today’s music scene and in Mexico more generally:

Mi predicción es que en un futuro – y espero que no muy lejano – va a aparecer alguien que va a responder a todo esto. No sé en que dirección pero como protesta hacía esto que esta sucediendo (personal interviews 2011).

My prediction is that in the future – and I hope that it’s not far away – someone is going to come along who will respond to all of this. I’m not sure in what direction, but it will be in protest to what is happening.

Fans and musicians, then, continue to have hope that Mexican youth will use this complex and evolving popular culture form not only to explore different ways of being a young person in Mexico (as they did in the 1980s), what it means to be Mexican (as they did in the late 1980s and 1990s), or how to participate in transnational trends and conversations (as they do today), but also as means of political expression and discourse.

Together, these findings challenge prominent characterizations of Mexican rock and underscore the importance of studying the genre in context and in consultation with those who produce and consume it. That is, as music scholar and sociologist Tia DeNora puts it, “It is important to address...questions of process, to try to specify how the social comes to be inscribed in the musical, if one is to spell out an account of how structural affinities or homologies between music and social formations might arise and change over time” (DeNora 2000: 3). This dissertation has embraced DeNora’s approach in contrast with the scholars of Mexican rock music cited above, who see Mexican rock music as “a particularly *disruptive* kind of myth, a myth of resistance through rituals, the politics of style, etc. etc.” (Frith 1992: 179).

Rather than *necessarily* creating political change or even prompting civic engagement, Mexican rock is an art form through which young fans and musicians articulate certain sensibilities. As Geertz explains in reference to the Balinese cockfight:

Like any art form...the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced...to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived (Geertz 1973: 443).

Similarly, Mexico’s rock music makes everyday experiences comprehensible and has done so differently at different moments in its history, thus demonstrating how it responds to external factors such as politics or economics. In the mid-1980s the primary sensibility

articulated by Mexican rock was a jokey, prankster vibe that spoke to youthful abandon and the desire to be young and to have a good time. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Mexican rock articulated a certain amount of critique and dissatisfaction while also engendering tremendous excitement and pride in a locally rooted music that successfully chronicled daily life. From the late 1990s to the present, the genre and what it is capable of communicating have splintered. The popularity of English language composition and indie rock indicate that for at least *some* of rock's adherents, the music is a means of engaging in global cosmopolitanism and/or escaping the harsh realities of local, lived experience.

## Conclusion

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This chapter has presented a number of findings generated by the historical overview and extensive research laid out in the previous four chapters. Using empirical evidence rather than assuming some inherent characteristic of popular culture, the first set of findings described the parallel between Mexican society and Mexican rock music, highlighting that both are currently experiencing an identity crisis. The chapter argued that this is an important set of findings because the period under investigation is so long and because such an observation is new to the literature on Mexico's rock music. The findings are also significant because they illustrate theoretical claims that the "nation" is a contingent, flexible notion that is malleable and whose meaning is always in process. Demonstrating the ways in which the nation is in fact a "hyperreal" construct helped illustrate how the fixed and stable idea of the nation has been decentered as the principle source for identity formation in contemporary Mexico.

The second set of findings outlined the many ways freer media and changes in communication technology have led to the fragmentation of Mexico's rock music scene and

have contributed to the apolitical role of the genre. This set of findings is significant because it illustrates arguments made in media studies theory that the production and consumption of transnational mediated cultural forms by non-Western audiences “signals membership in a modern, cosmopolitan elite” (Kraidy 2010: 7), while also creating the challenge of maintaining a locally-rooted identity in the face of transnational cosmopolitanism.

The final set of findings argued that prominent accounts that characterize Mexican rock as an overtly political tool of expression for Mexico’s economically marginalized youth have only ever been partially and sporadically true. This finding is important because it points out the ways that Mexico’s rock music has been misrepresented and how the multiple and diverse uses of Mexico’s rock music have been, until now, sidelined and overshadowed by its, arguably, more exciting political function. This finding, then, concurs with (though not quite as derisively) popular music scholar and sociologist Simon Frith’s assertion “that the cultural study of popular music has been, in effect, an anxiety-driven search by radical intellectuals...for a model of consumption—for the perfect consumer, the subcultural idol, the mod, the punk, the cool commodity fetishist, the organic intellectual of the high street who can *stand in for them*” (Frith 1992: 180). Together, these findings help, in Geertzian terms, return us to “what our informants are up to, or think they are up to” (Geertz 1973: 15). For Geertz, the details of everyday life communicate meanings and are capable of saying something about the social world and its inhabitants. Through the presentation of this dissertation’s findings, this chapter has endeavored to do just that.

## Chapter VIII

### Concluding Remarks

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Mexico's rock music has had a long and interesting life. This dissertation has explained that the sound and characteristics of the genre have changed markedly since its re-birth in the 1980s until today. Additionally, what it has meant to the musicians and fans that create, produce, distribute, and consume it and the social role it has played have evolved over time. This chapter first discusses the significance of the research and analysis presented in the preceding pages. Second, it describes some of the limitations of this study. Finally, it proposes additional areas of inquiry that would contribute to our understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between Mexican rock music, youth, politics, and the state.

#### Significance

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The first objective of this dissertation was to provide an historical overview of Mexico's rock music, its political, economic, and social contexts, its relationship with youth, politics, and the state, and the role of the mass media in these relationships. While neither exhaustive nor encyclopedic, it is the first attempt in academic literature (in English or Spanish) to provide such an overview of the period from rock's re-emergence in the 1980s to the present. Its contribution is especially significant because the project's focus on the complex relationship between rock music, youth, the state, and the media is new to the literature.

The second objective of the project was to utilize a theoretical and methodological approach that differs from previous studies of Mexican rock music in order to better understand the music and its relationship with youth, politics, and the state. This approach

drew on the contributions of certain popular music studies scholars, scholars of Mexican youth, global media studies scholarship, and the “interpretive science” of anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Examining production, texts, and audiences within the rich context of everyday life and including political, economic, social, and historical dimensions in analysis has led to a richer, more nuanced, and fuller picture of the relationships in question. This is an important intervention in the literature of Mexico’s rock music because it demonstrates that there is no inherent meaning in “rock,” that to truly understand it we have to employ a multi-dimensional, historically situated, and richly contextualized account that includes production, texts, and audiences and attempts to ascertain the meaning(s) and use(s) of popular cultural phenomena in everyday life.

More broadly, this dissertation has offered a theoretical intervention that is significant to the field of global media studies by heeding Szurmuk and Waisbord’s argument that scholarship must move beyond demonstrating the “active and mestizo character of culture,” finding “more examples of cross-border cultures,” or hammering “more nails on the coffin of essentialism” (Szurmuk and Waisbord 2011: 32). Instead, it has built (and demonstrated the usefulness) of an innovative theoretical framework that can be used as a model for analyzing popular cultural forms that travel globally and act locally, i.e., forms that originate in a foreign context and are then made to *mean* something particular in their local setting, while still interacting and engaging with the global trends impacting said popular cultural form.

Additionally, this dissertation has provided fodder for debates in the field of media studies by contending that examination of popular culture is an important means of exploring issues of national political and economic significance. While studying popular culture simply because it is “popular” is one avenue media studies scholars take, studying it

because it illuminates something of social, political, and/or economic relevance better positions the field and its studies and puts our work into meaningful conversation with other disciplines.

Finally, by privileging a popular culture form that is of particular importance and relevance to young people, this dissertation has, following Mexican youth scholars such as Reguillo and Urteaga, brought attention to Mexico's young people, their social practices, and how these relate to economic, political, and cultural currents. Additionally, it has brought their comments, perceptions, and opinions to the fore by relying heavily on young people's own accounts of Mexico's rock music and its significance in their personal lives, in relation to the country as a whole, and in connection to global trends and conversations.

These contributions are significant, however, this dissertation does not pretend to be comprehensive and has been limited by the particular scope and parameters of the project design, as well as the shortcomings of its author. These limitations are discussed in the following section.

### Limitations

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When it comes to rock music, gender is an important dimension of research. While this dissertation spoke with, and utilized comments from, young women and young men (ten of the thirty-five face-to-face interviews were with women), the significance of gender within Mexico's rock music scene was not examined. Men dominate Mexico's rock music scene as artists and fans, but observation indicated that women are very involved as fans, and are increasing their participation as musicians.<sup>72</sup> Within Mexico's music industry, the presence and participation of women is notably scant, which is indicative of larger issues involving

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<sup>72</sup> Descartes a Kant, Austin TV, Elis Paprika, Quiero Club, and Elli Noise are all either led by or have prominent female members. Additionally, the recent success of pop-rockers Carla Morrison, Ximena Sariñana, and Natalia LaFourcade has increased the visibility and perhaps even opportunity for women in rock.

women's access to and opportunities within Mexico's workforce. One seminal contribution has been made in this vein: singer-songwriter and sociologist Tere Estrada's 2008 book *Sirenas al ataque: historia de las mujeres rockeras mexicanas (1956-2006)* ("*Sirens on the attack: history of Mexican women rockers (1956-2006)*") is a detailed account of the women who have participated in Mexico's rock since its inception and is an invaluable, encyclopedically rich resource (Estrada 2008).

The relationship between Mexico and the United States is only occasionally touched on in this dissertation. The dynamics between the two countries are assessed endlessly in academic literature on both sides of the border. Often, this literature analyzes the flow of people, information, and culture across the border, along the border, or within immigrant communities in the US. This dissertation limited its focus to Mexican rock within Mexico and only discussed Mexico's relationship with the US when it was important for political and economic reasons. While the US often looms large in academic analyses of Mexico, it is not nearly so important to the daily lives of most Mexicans (especially the vast majority who do not live along the border) as the literature would indicate. Therefore, this dissertation elected to sideline the relationship in order to de-emphasize the importance of the US in Mexico for Mexicans yet this strategy deliberately limits the scope of the project.

The fieldwork for this dissertation took place exclusively in Mexico City, and while some of the newspapers, magazines, and online resources consulted are available nationwide, this project is limited by its reliance on Mexico City's rock music scene. Mexico City is the heart of politics, economics, and cultural production in Mexico. In some ways, Mexico City is the equivalent of having Washington, D.C., New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco all in one place, rather than scattered across the US. It is Mexico City's centrality that justified it as the primary location for fieldwork. Still, because it is such a large, diverse,

and active cosmopolitan center, it is decidedly different from the rest of the country. Indeed, as one scholar of Mexican rock pointed out, the rock music identity crisis described in this dissertation may not be so acute in other areas of the country (personal correspondence 2012). Additionally, the rock music scenes that have emerged in Monterrey, Tijuana, and, most recently, Guadalajara, each have their own history, influences, and struggles that have shaped their character and music.

Paradoxically, attempting to cover such a long, contemporary period (1980 to the present) in one project, while immensely rewarding in some ways, is also limiting. Periodization and attempts to grasp the meaning and social role of rock music through (at least) three distinct periods diverted attention and focus. Therefore, the richness of detail and depth of analysis for each period are less robust than had the focus been on a shorter, more narrowly defined period of investigation.

While this dissertation consciously and deliberately privileged personal interviews in its analysis, it would benefit from a broader and deeper understanding of Mexico's rock music's production. A better understanding of these processes and the relationship between production and the mass media would enhance the historical overview provided in chapters four, five, and six, and likely would have strengthened this dissertation's findings.

Finally, conducting research in a second language presents challenges and rewards. While my Mexican-Spanish is fluent and I typically speak and understand the language with ease and comfort, there are undoubtedly nuances that escape even the most dedicated ear. Additionally, popular culture in general and rock music in particular are filled with slang, double-entendre, and veiled references. While I am confident that I captured and understood many of these (and when I was aware I did not, I relied on trusted friends and informants for assistance), this study is limited by my own socio-cultural and linguistic shortcomings.

This dissertation's limitations have indicated a number of areas for further inquiry and additional directions for research. First, women's participation and representation in Mexico's rock music, as well as the role of both femininity and masculinity in rock music deserve greater attention. While Estrada's book is an important resource, separate studies should be conducted on both masculinity in Mexico's rock music and female fandom in the rock music scene. Because men currently dominate the scene, exploring masculinity would provide fruitful insights on a number of interesting questions, including the significance of the scene for young men, how rock music reinforces and/or destabilizes gender roles, and the importance of patriarchy and male domination in Mexico's popular culture. Examining female fandom would explore similar questions from a decidedly different angle, additionally it would highlight women's participation and representation in the scene and engage directly with young women whose voices are undervalued and often ignored in the world of rock music.

As noted above, this dissertation has not paid particular attention to Mexico's relationship with the United States and the impact this relationship has had on Mexico's rock music. Examining these connections more fully would certainly include the influence of US rock on the Mexican rock music scene, the contribution of US record labels and other cultural producers to the scene, and the dynamics of what, how, and with what effect popular culture crosses borders. Along these lines, fruitful scholarship would come from exploring Mexican rock music and/or Spanish language rock music within immigrant communities in the US. What does this music sound like? What uses and meanings does it have? What social roles does it play? Where is it important and why is it important there (and not elsewhere)?

While Mexico's relationship with the United States is significant, its relationships with other Latin American countries are as well and have been especially so when it comes to rock music. The earliest waves of Spanish language rock emerged in South America in the 1970s during a period of devastating military rule (for an account of Argentina's rock nacional see Vila 1989). This music was important in shaping Mexico's own version of *rock en español*. A comparative study including one Latin American country (or more) and examining how people in different localities adapt, adopt, transform and utilize rock would be of particular interest to global media studies. Adding a diachronic, historical dimension to the study would be especially compelling.

Nevertheless, studying short periods of time can also be fruitful. Another avenue for future research would be to focus intently on Mexico's rock music during one, distinct period to explore it in more depth than diachronic analyses are typically able to do. While this kind of research would not provide any comparative information, it would go into greater detail in examining the nuances, complexities, and idiosyncrasies of Mexican rock, its production, its texts, and its audiences. This in-depth analysis could later prove useful when compared to other studies that examine some other, equally well-detailed period.

Finally, scholarship on Mexican rock and its relationship with youth, politics, and the state would benefit from a production-oriented analysis that explores the intricacies of the relationship between production and distribution via the mass media. Why has Mexican rock sounded the way it has? How have producers constructed the music so as to either appeal to the mass media or to shun them? What would we learn if we were to apply classic media studies theoretical constructs (framing and agenda setting, for example) to rock music and its exposure and distribution via the mass media? How have production and the role of the mass media changed with digitization and the incredible growth of the Internet?

This section has made it clear that there are myriad avenues for future research on Mexico's rock music. As an area of inquiry it is nowhere near exhausted. At the conclusion of his chapter on *la banda*, politics, and Mexico's rock music, sociologist Héctor Castillo Berthier declares:

There are many projects yet to be done that would document and strengthen this narrative and, without a doubt, this is a propitious time to develop them, since rock lives, vibrates, and is a fundamental part of Mexico's present-day youth culture. That is why we have no other choice than to repeat, yet again, that festive and hopeful phrase: Long live Mexican rock!

This dissertation has endeavored to meet Castillo Berthier's call to action, recognizes that there is considerably more work to be done, and enthusiastically echoes Castillo Berthier's charge.

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## Appendix A

### Selected Discography & Recommended Video Links

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#### Appendix A.1 – Phase One 1980-1988

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Rodrigo González, *Hurbanhistorias*, 1983

El Tri, *Simplemente*, 1984

Kenny y los eléctricos, *Juntos por el rock*, 1986

Rodrigo González, *El profeta del nopal*, 1986 (posthumous release)

#### Appendix A.2 – Phase Two 1988-1997

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Banda Bostik, *Rock de la banda para la banda*, 1988

Caifanes, *Caifanes*, 1988

Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio, *El Circo*, 1991

Caifanes, *El Silencio*, 1992

Café Tacuba, *Café Tacuba*, 1992

Santa Sabina, *Santa Sabina*, 1992

La Lupita, *Qué bonito es casi todo*, 1993

Víctimas del Doctor Cerebro, *Víctimas del Doctor Cerebro*, 1993

Café Tacuba, *Re*, 1994

Santa Sabina, *Símbolos*, 1994

La Cuca, *La racha*, 1995

Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio, *Baile de Máscaras*, 1996

Control Machete, *Mucho Barato*, 1997

Ely Guerra, *Pa' Morirse de Amor*, 1997

Julieta Venegas, *Aquí*, 1997

Molotov, *¿Dónde Jugarán las Niñas*, 1997

#### Appendix A.3 – Phase Three (1998-present)

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Plastilina Mosh, *Aquamosh*, 1998

Café Tacuba, *Revés/ Yo Soy*, 1999

La Barranta, *Rueda de los tiempos*, 1999

Kinky, *Kinky*, 2002

Panda, *La revancha del príncipe charro*, 2002

Café Tacuba, *Cuatro Caminos*, 2003

Zoé, *Rocanlover*, 2003

Panteón Rococó, *Tres Veces Tres*, 2004

Natalia y La Forquetina, *Casa*, 2005

Bengala, *Bengala*, 2006

Austin TV, *Fontana Bella*, 2007

Café Tacuba, *Sino*, 2007

Chikita Violenta, *Stars and Suns Sessions*, 2008

Hello Seahorse!, *Hoy a las Ocho*, 2008

Kinky, *Barracuda*, 2008

Los Daniels, *Moodanza*, 2008

Zoé, *Reptilectric*, 2008

Bengala, *Oro*, 2010

Ely Guerra, *Hombre Invisible*, 2010

Austin TV, *Caballeros del Albedrío*, 2011

## Append A.4 – Recommended Links

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[Available via YouTube as of 9 March 2012]

Caifanes, “Nubes,” *El Silencio*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nxr9esKOuLw>

Café Tacuba, “Ingrata,” *Re*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEfaxwK3mn4>

Café Tacuba, “Dejate Caer,” Vale Callampa:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfwlDbUuJ50>

Molotov, “Frijolero,” *Dance and Dense Denso*:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iJMOBcPQyg>

Los Dynamite, “Frenzy,” *Greatest Hits*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6Cd-EGsAXo>

Austin TV, “Marduk,” *Fontana Bella*: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajsjZ2\\_YRos](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajsjZ2_YRos)

Hummersqueal, “Caída Libre,” *El Último Aliento*:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FLa1282Ucs>

## Appendix B

### Interview Guides

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#### Appendix B.1 – English Interview Schedule

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##### **Magdalena Red**

“Re-Interpreting Mexican Rock Music: The ‘Local’ Form of a Global Movement”

Interview Schedule

(updated 3/9/10)

##### **The Scene**

- 1) How do you conceptualize (define/think about) Mexico’s rock music scene?
  - a. Compare the scene of the 1980s and ‘90s to that of today.
  - b. What are the major differences?
    - i. If there are any, how would you describe the shift/change?

##### **Personal Experiences**

- 2) How would you describe your involvement with (position in) the rock music scene?
  - a. If you were involved in the 1980s and ‘90s, has your involvement changed?
    - i. If so, how?
  - b. What role has the music played in your life? Day-to-day? Weekends? Over time?

##### **Participants**

- 3) Who participated in the Mexican rock music scene of the 1980s and ‘90s?
- 4) Who participates today?

##### **The Music Itself**

- 5) What are some characteristics of the Mexican rock music of the 1980s and ‘90s?
- 6) What are the characteristics of the music today?
  - a. What are the principle differences?
  - b. If any, how would you account for them?

##### **Context, Geography**

- 7) What is the relationship between the Mexican rock music of the 1980s and ‘90s and the neighborhood? The city? The nation? International trends?
- 8) What is the relationship between the Mexican rock music of today and the neighborhood? The city? The nation? International trends?

##### **Mass Media**

- 9) What was the relationship between the music, the musicians, and the mass media in the 1980s and ‘90s?

- 10) What is the relationship between the music, the musicians, and the mass media today?
  - a. What are the principle differences?
  - b. If any, how would you account for them?

## Appendix B.2 – Spanish Interview Schedule

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### **Magdalena Red**

“Re-Interpreting Mexican Rock Music: The ‘Local’ Form of a Global Movement”  
Una Nueva Interpretación del Rock Mexicano: Una Forma Local de un Movimiento  
Global

Interview Schedule – Spanish Translation  
(updated 8/31/10)

#### **La escena**

- 1) ¿Cómo defines (o qué piensas de) la escena rockera en México?
  - a. ¿Cómo se compara con le escena que existía en los ‘80s y ‘90s?
  - b. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias principales?
    - i. Si hay diferencias, ¿cómo describirías el cambio?

#### **Experiencias Personales**

- 2) ¿Cómo describes tu participación y tu posición dentro de la escena rockera?
  - a. Si estuvieras metido durante los ‘80s y ‘90s, ¿cómo ha cambiado tu participación desde entonces?
  - b. ¿Qué rol ha traído la música rockera en tu vida? ¿En tu vida cotidiana? Los fines de semana? A través del tiempo?

#### **Participantes**

- 3) ¿Quiénes son los rockeros, los participantes en la escena de los ‘80s y ‘90s?
- 4) ¿Quién participe hoy?

#### **La música en si**

- 5) ¿Cuáles son algunas de las características de la música rockera de los ‘80s y ‘90s?
- 6) ¿Cuáles son las características de la música rockera de hoy?
  - a. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias principales?
  - b. Si hay, ¿cómo las puedes explicar?

#### **Contexto y geografía**

- 7) ¿Qué es la relación entre la música rockera mexicana de los ‘80s y ‘90s y los vecindades? ¿la ciudad? ¿La nación? ¿Tendencias internacionales?
- 8) ¿Qué es la relación entre la música rockera mexicana de hoy y los vecindades? ¿la ciudad? ¿La nación? ¿Tendencias internacionales?

### **Los medios de comunicación**

- 9) ¿Qué era la relación entre la música, los músicos, y los medios de comunicación masiva durante los '80s y '90s?
  
- 10) ¿Qué es la relación entre la música, los músicos, y los medios de comunicación masiva hoy?
  - a. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias principales?
  - b. Si hay, ¿cómo las puedes explicar?

# Appendix C

## Consent Forms

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### Appendix C.1 – English Consent Form

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**Re-Interpreting Mexican Rock Music: The "Local" Form of a Global Movement**  
Principal Investigator: Magdelana Red

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
4/4/10 version 1

Please read the following material that explains this research study. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study.

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Magdelana Red, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 478 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-478. This project is being done under the direction of Professor Robert Trager, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 478 UCB. Magdelana Red can be reached at 303-458-0017 (U.S. telephone) or at [magdelana.red@colorado.edu](mailto:magdelana.red@colorado.edu). Professor Trager can be reached at 303-492-0502 or at [trager@colorado.edu](mailto:trager@colorado.edu). In Mexico City, Magdelana Red's local contact number is 5584-3829. Additionally, you may contact Marco Velezquez, a resident of Mexico City, at [marcophronesis@yahoo.com](mailto:marcophronesis@yahoo.com).

**Project Description:**

This research study is about Mexican rock music, individuals' perceptions and experiences of it, and the how these experiences of the music and the music itself fit into the global rock music movement. This research challenges historical accounts of Mexican rock music by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from fans, musicians, producers, and promoters themselves. This information will contribute to understandings of the relationship between individuals, cultural forms (like rock music), and global trends. You are being asked to be in this study because of your involvement (as a fan, musician, producer, or promoter) of Mexico's rock music. It is entirely your choice whether or not to participate in this study. Thirty participants will be invited to participate in this research study.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions and engage in conversation about your experiences with and perceptions of Mexican rock music. No sensitive questions will be asked.

Participating should take 1-2 hours of your time. Participation will take place at the time and location of your choice – a place you will feel comfortable talking for 1-2 hours.

Participation in this research may include audio recording. These recordings will be used as a record of our conversation and to capture your exact words. The recordings will be retained for no more than ten (10) years, will be kept in a secure location, and will be destroyed at the end of ten years. Magdelana Red is the only person who will have access to these recordings. Being audio recorded is not a requirement for participation. You may still participate in the study should you choose for our conversation not be recorded.

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There is no known potential for risk in this study.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study.

1 of 2

initials \_\_\_\_\_

Version: 1.0 Edit date: 2/4/10



**FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO—ENTREVISTAS Y GRABACION**

8/31/10 versión en español 1

**Una Nueva Interpretación del Rock Mexicano: Una Forma Local de un Movimiento Global**

Investigadora Principal: Magdalena Red

Favor de leer el siguiente material que explica esta investigación. A firmar este forma, usted indicará que sido informado sobre el estudio que desea participar. Queremos que entienda lo que estamos pidiendo y los riesgos y beneficios—si existe alguno—vinculados al estudio.

Estamos pidiendo que participe en una investigación dirigida por Magdalena Red, una estudiante del doctorado en la Universidad de Boulder, Escuela de Periodismo y los Medios de Comunicación, 478 UCB, Boulder, Colorado 80309-478. Profesor Robert Trager esta guiando este proyecto (School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 478 UCB). Usted se puede comunicar con Magdalena Red al número de teléfono +1-303-458-0017 (USA) o al correo: [magdalena.red@colorado.edu](mailto:magdalena.red@colorado.edu). Se puede comunicar con Profesor Trager al número de teléfono: +1-303-492-0502 o al correo: [trager@colorado.edu](mailto:trager@colorado.edu). En México el número de teléfono de Magdalena es 5584-3829. Además se puede comunicar con Marco Velazquez, un habitante de la ciudad de México, [marcophronesis@yahoo.com](mailto:marcophronesis@yahoo.com).

**Descripción del Proyecto:**

Este estudio se trata del rock mexicano, percepciones y experiencias con esa música, y como esas experiencias de la música y la música en si quedan en el movimiento del rock global. Esta investigación cuestiona crónicas históricas del rock mexicano a través de la colección, análisis, e interpretación de datos de los fans, músicos, productores, y promotores de la música. Esta información contribuirá a nuestro entendimiento de la relación entre individuos, formas culturales (como el rock mexicano), y tendencias globales. Estamos invitando su participación por su conexión (como fan, músico, productor, o promotor) del rock mexicano. Participar o no es completamente su decisión. El número de personas entrevistadas no excederá 30.

**Si decide participar en este estudio, pediremos permiso para hacer las siguientes cosas:**

- Entrevistarle a la hora y en el lugar que elige. Esta entrevista será grabada para ayudar a la investigadora, pero las cintas de las entrevistas no serán examinadas por alguien que no sea el investigador o sus profesores. Estas grabaciones serán destruidas dentro de diez años. Si prefiere que la entrevista no sea grabada, favor de informarle a Magdalena Red al principio de la conversación.

**Tiempo total estimado de participación** es aproximada mente una hora.

**Riesgos** de participar en el estudio:

- Ningún mayor que los riesgos encontrados en la vida cotidiana.

**Beneficios** de participar en el estudio:

- Participantes no van a recibir ningún beneficio personal por participar en el estudio.

**Compensación:**

- Ninguna compensación será recibida por los participantes—participación es completamente voluntaria.

**Confidencialidad y protecciones de la privacidad:**

- Ningún participante será pedido a compartir información que no quiera compartir.
- Toda la información que participantes pidan que sea confidencial no será incluida en el estudio sin su permiso.

1 of 2

siglas \_\_\_\_\_

Spanish Version: 1.0 Edit date: 8/31/10

- Todos los participantes tienen el derecho de dejar el estudio en cualquier momento.
- Toda la información, durante el período del estudio, será protegida en una computadora con códigos de seguridad.
- Todos los participantes serán identificados a través de siglas en documentos escritos.
- Todo el acceso a la información que puede ser usada para identificar los participantes durante el estudio será limitado al investigador y sus profesores.
- Toda la información que puede ser usada para identificar los participantes será destruida dentro de 10 años. Todos los documentos en papel serán destruidos dentro de 5 años.

Los **archivos** de este estudio serán protegidos y mantenidos de una forma confidencial. Personas autorizadas de la Universidad de Colorado en Boulder y miembros del Institutional Review Board tienen el derecho legal de mirar los datos suyos y van a proteger la **confidencialidad** de estos datos hasta tal punto permitido por la ley. Todas las publicaciones hechas van a excluir cualquier información que le puede identificar como participante. Durante el estudio, el investigador le va a avisar de cualquier información nueva que le podría influir en su decisión de participar en el estudio.

**Contactos y Preguntas:**

Si Ud. tiene una pregunta sobre el estudio, quiere información adicional, o quiere terminar su participación, contacte a la investigadora. Su nombre su e-mail están arriba. Si quiere obtener información sobre el estudio, tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas y quiere discutirlos con alguien que no está participando en el estudio, por favor contacte la oficina de IRB a Executive Secretary, Human Research Committee, 26 UCB, Regent Administrative Center 308, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, (303) 735-3702. Su confidencialidad será protegida, si quiere, hasta el punto posible.

*Puede guardar una copia de este formulario. Por favor firme la otra y devuélvela firmado. Está tomando una decisión de participar en un estudio. Su firma indica que ha leído la información arriba y ha decidido participar. Si luego quiera terminar su participación, solamente necesita decirlo al investigador. Puede terminar su participación en cualquier momento.*

Nombre Completo de Participante \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de Participante \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

*Las grabaciones de este proyecto serán útiles para presentar en algún congreso científico o como demostraciones en una clase en el futuro. Por favor firme a continuación, si permite usar las grabaciones para tales usos en dichas situaciones.*

*Yo doy mi permiso para que las grabaciones sean usadas en este proyecto de investigación y para propósitos educativos.*

Firma de Participante \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Consent Amendment

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Red, Magdalena  
Exempt Protocol 0410.26, approved May 13, 2010  
Consent Amendment submitted March 7, 2011

#### **5. Waiver or Alteration of all Elements of Consent (no verbal and no written consent)**

A request to waive written and verbal informed consent must be accompanied by a complete explanation in response to the four statements below. All of the criteria must be met to qualify for a waiver of both written and verbal consent.

1. The proposed research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects.
2. The waiver or alteration of consent will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.
3. The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.
4. Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

---

After having completed 10 interviews with informants in Mexico City regarding the rock music scene in Mexico, as well as individual's experiences of and within said scene, I will now be conducting brief, informal interviews with attendees at an urban rock music festival in Mexico City (ViveLatino 2011). Recruitment will adhere to the same scripts and procedures as described in my exempt IRB protocol approved May 13, 2010 (#0410.26). I am, however, submitting this amendment to request waiver of consent for these interviews.

1. The proposed research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects.

My research asks fans of Mexico's rock music questions about their experiences with the music and its accompanying scene in order to grasp the nuances of each of the different periods of the music's history from the 1980s until today. Questions such as "Why do you like rock music?" "Why do you prefer it to other genres of music?" and "What role has Mexico's rock music played in your life or in the life of the city?" ground my study in ethnographically rich statements from participants in the scene.

In the context of a massive music festival occurring over a three-day period in the middle of Mexico City (one of the biggest city's in the world), conversing with an interviewer poses very little risk to participants. Indeed, media outlets and journalists from around the world will be present at the event and conducting similar interviews.

2. The waiver or alteration of consent will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

The rights and welfare of participants is extremely important to me as a researcher. I believe that my interview protocol in no way compromises informants who choose to participate in the study. It will be made clear to interviewees that I am conducting research and that their comments will be kept anonymous and protected by pseudonyms, unless they specifically request that their names be used. I found in earlier research that participants were proud to participate in the chronicling of Mexican rock music and did not wish to be made anonymous (nevertheless, according to my IRB protocol #0410.26,

Red, Magdalena  
Exempt Protocol 0410.26, approved May 13, 2010  
Consent Amendment submitted March 7, 2011

my interviewees were guaranteed anonymity). People who elect not to be interviewed will not be; while those who do will be informed that they may terminate the interview at any time.

3. The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.

My hope is to conduct 30 or more brief, informal interviews during the ViveLatino festival. These conversations will likely occur organically with fellow spectators. Additionally, given the extremely public nature of outdoor music festivals with large numbers of attendees, conversations will often include groups of friends rather than isolated individuals. In such a setting, administering my two page consent form, or carefully going over its details verbally would be incongruous and could easily stymie a free flowing and open dialogue. In any research situation dependent on ethnographic methods, an ideal interview situation would encourage informal, uninhibited, honest commentary from informants. Without much time to establish rapport with interviewees in this setting, foregoing the consent process and proceeding directly to the meaty questions at hand is the surest way to create a close-to-ideal situation.

4. Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

I will provide my contact information to any participant who is interested in it (via business cards easily stored in a pocket or wallet). Thus, if participants would like more information about the study at any time, they may request it. This serves the additional end of providing me a way to maintain contact with interested participants, which would be eminently useful as I analyze and write about my research at a later time.