



Article

Beyond the Crew: Hip-Hop and Professionalization in Mexico City

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cus**Andrew Green**

University of Glasgow, UK

Abstract

In recent years *profesionalización* – professionalization – has become an increasingly influential concept in the hip-hop scene in Mexico City. This term can refer to a variety of changing practices relating to artistic presentation, the organization of hip-hop events, and the hip-hop scene's model of creative production. The influence of professionalization relates to the rising specialization of hip-hop production and the increasing importance of the digital circulation of music and images; increasingly, success is made on YouTube and Spotify. It also relates to new sources of income, such as freestyle rap battles with corporate sponsorship, and to nascent spaces for hip-hop within adult education. Above all, professionalization relates to a series of structural changes connected to the declining influence of crews, oriented around something akin to Spillman's 'non-strategic solidarity': fraternity, informality, and shared identity. In some cases, crews are giving way to more formal 'teams', oriented around the solo artists that now dominate the hip-hop scene.

This article builds on ongoing ethnographic research since 2012 and a series of interviews with over 40 local hip-hop artists, to explore professionalism and professionalization as emergent, negotiated values within Mexico City's hip-hop scene. It offers a frame through which different ideas of the 'professional' may be considered: object-forming (relating to the creation of a 'professional' music object) and subject-forming (relating to the formation of a 'professional' subject). *Profesionalización* cannot be understood in a functionalist sense, nor may the hip-hop 'professional' be conceptualized as a straightforward antonym of 'amateur'. This article instead shows different ways that 'object-forming' and 'subject-forming' professionalization both incorporate and texture the 'non-strategic' and distinguish hip-hop 'professionalism' from the same texture the 'non-strategic', and distinguish hip-hop professionalism from it.

Keywords

digital media, hip-hop, insecurity, Mexico, precarity, professions, streaming

Corresponding author:

Dr Andrew Green, Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow, University of Glasgow College of Arts, 14 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QH, UK.

Email: Andrew.green@glasgow.ac.uk

Introduction

Research diary, August 2019: I meet up with rapper Zirck Saucedo in north Mexico City, and we head towards the south-east, where he's scheduled to headline a concert. Zirck – an economics student who also works part-time in a bank – is sufficiently high-profile to headline mid-size events; his music combines rap and pop. On our way, Zirck tells me he's trying to 'professionalize' [profesionalizar] and is creating a new 'team' [equipo], with a designer, a graffiti artist, a manager, a producer, and a DJ. The pressure now is to release high-quality YouTube videos, and you need a team for that.

On our way, we meet up with Doxer, another rapper who's agreed to be Zirck's corista [backing singer] onstage tonight. We arrive to Los Reyes/La Paz, on the boundary between Mexico City and Estado de México around it: the beating heart of Mexico City's hip-hop scene. I used to pass by here on the way to work twelve years ago, but it's a lot more insecure now than it was.

At Los Reyes we meet his DJ and another rapper. The venue's a short distance from the metro, so five of us squeeze into a tiny motorickshaw, equipment and all, on our way there. In the motorickshaw Zirck gives his pitch over the din of the engine – he says he's forming a team, it's time to take this seriously. It'll work well, he tells them, we've got financial backing, and he and Doxer have already performed in various parts of the country. We need to rehearse every week, Zirck says, to cautious assent.¹

During ethnographic research carried out since 2012, hip-hop artists in Mexico City with whom I have conducted ongoing research have told me about an increasing drive towards what is termed *profesionalización* ('professionalization'). A deceptively simple term, *profesionalización* can refer to a variety of changing practices relating to artistic presentation, the organization of hip-hop events, and the hip-hop scene's model of creative production. It is, further, inflected by class and age, associated at some points with hip-hop's youngest generation, who have no qualms with making money from music, and at others with artists who are well-organized, arrive punctually, and do not overrun their designated performance times. Equally, as this article's opening vignette illustrates, in an urban context dominated by informality, efforts to promote *profesionalización* often take place in precarious settings.

Profesionalización reflects how the rapid transition to streaming in Mexico has created new opportunities for hip-hop livelihoods. Established hip-hop artist Danger Alto Kalibre estimated to me in a 2018 interview that digital platforms had made it possible for '15 or 20' hip-hop artists in Mexico to now make a living from the genre. Yet *profesionalización* is also connected to other sources of hip-hop livelihoods: free-style rap battles² with corporate sponsorship, and hip-hop pedagogy. It also results from the pressures of economic precarity, as underground artists realize that they may no longer be able to afford to continue making hip-hop for free. Tracing the new emphasis on *profesionalización*, a term that usefully summarizes various linguistic formulae denoting an advance of 'professional' culture within hip-hop, is thus not straightforward. As sociologists have demonstrated (Evetts, 2003; Wilensky, 1964), professionalization is simultaneously a value, an activity, and a process. It may, therefore, be used to describe music, the people that make it, the ways that they behave, and the organizations through which they cooperate. It denotes, simultaneously, both a *value* and a *practice*.

What is especially notable about this term, then, is the range of activities it describes. These activities nevertheless have in common that they tend to displace creativity from the informal, shared, convivial context of the hip-hop ‘crew’, a social formation marked by what Spillman (2012: 354) describes as ‘nonstrategic solidarity’: ‘collective identities, normative and status orders, and camaraderie’ emerging from sociality rather than shared objectives or strategies. Spillman (2012: 345–355) observes that nonstrategic solidarity in fact underpins the ways that business associations narrate value, which in turn makes possible more strategic, objective-oriented forms of association such as networking. This claim runs counter to the commonplace notion that business action is oriented around strategic self-interest.

Building on Spillman’s work, in this article I argue that *profesionalización* is best understood as a conscious yet open-ended process of oppositional reconfiguration away from non-strategic solidarity. I seek to navigate this multiplicity by proposing an ideal-typical distinction between what I term ‘object-forming’ and ‘subject-forming’ professionalization. In the former, professionalism is an attribute of the music object and the ways that it is mediated, commoditized (Taylor, 2007), and aesthetically presented. In the latter, by contrast, the ‘professional’ pertains to emerging subjectivities and modes of being. In practice, I argue, neither transcend non-strategic action; rather, I explore how they texture strategic and non-strategic action in different ways.

Literature: Musical Professions

Professionalization has long been a central term for sociology. The mid-20th-century ‘classical’, functionalist concept of the professions emphasized several qualities of professional occupations: systematized, specialized knowledge produced by institutions; professional ethics; and in-work professional autonomy (Durkheim, 1992 [1957]; Evetts, 2003, 2011). Within this conceptualization, professionalization was viewed as a teleology: emphasizing the expanding horizons of the ‘professional’, sociologists approached professionalization as a set of developmental stages (Caplow, 1954; Wilensky, 1964) or the accumulation of a series of traits (Legge and Exley, 1975). Later work painted a more critical picture, highlighting the role of ‘professionalism’ in fomenting trust in particular services (Dingwall, 2008); the tendency for professional institutions to monopolize certain occupations (Larson, 1977); and the complex interrelations between professions maneuvering to occupy different ‘jurisdictions’ (Abbott, 1988: 7–9). Recent years have witnessed increasing anxieties about the relevance of ‘professionalism’ in a globalizing world and within free-market economies (Freidson, 2001; Dingwall, 2008: 99–110; Evetts, 2003: 395–396). Digitalization has been invoked as a transformational force, threatening the viability of the traditional professions (Susskind and Susskind, 2016); an emerging ‘new professionalism’ has both placed greater emphasis on the creative industries and destabilized understandings of the ‘professional’, at the same time as precarious work in the creative industries is described as semi- or post-professional (Evetts, 2011; Florida, 2002). Indeed, this trend has been criticized as normalizing precarity: McRobbie (2016: 58) critiques the ‘labour reform by stealth’ effected as young people are encouraged into the unregulated creative industries. The extent to which creative labor is

comparable to other forms of work – especially under the banner of ‘knowledge work’ – has also been debated (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 52ff.).

The complex, critical scholarly histories of this term, however, often disappear within social research into music, leaving the ‘professional’ as a floating signifier or straightforward antonym of ‘amateur’ (e.g. Guerra, 2016; Lee, 2009; McKerrell, 2014). This confusion reflects the real complexities in locating the musically ‘professional’ which led Frederickson and Rooney (1990) to recommend referring to a ‘music occupation’ rather than ‘music profession’. Efforts to create a status of ‘music professional’ through the development of educational institutions and labor unions have been noted throughout recent history. In comparison to other institutionalized professions, these efforts have had limited success (Golding, 2018), often rooted in formal organizations’ inability to monopolize musicianship amidst an abundance of supply of trained musicians (Cloonan and Williamson, 2016; Ehrlich, 1985; Sargeant, 2004). Notions of musical authenticity, and puritanical ideas connecting labor to sacrifice, may impede the recognition of music as work (Ryan, 2011); in turn, musical labor is commodified and monetized in highly particular ways (Taylor, 2007). Professional musicianship has long drawn from diverse sources of income, taking refuge in ‘pool professions’ such as teaching (Abbott, 1988: 131). In this sense, recent anxieties within music education about the teaching of courses that privilege neoliberal entrepreneurialism and the ‘portfolio career’ – alleged to undermine collective action among musicians – should be understood in continuity with the past (Cook, 2018; Moore, 2016).

Such critical accounts underscore the undefined nature of ‘professionalism’ itself, within and beyond the music sector. It is important, then, to ensure that musical ‘professionalization’ is explored from an emic perspective (cf. Evetts, 2003). More work is needed to frame ‘professionalism’ as an aspect of (musical) cultures as well as the product of certain systems for organizing labor. In her study of amateur ‘hidden musicians’ in an English city, Finnegan (2007: 16) highlights the ‘tendentious’ nature of claims to professionalism, which ‘suggest social status and local affiliation . . . a political statement rather than an indicator of economic status’. Her intervention serves as a reminder that the local complexity of professional artistic cultures often exceeds our ability to understand these cultures in a functionalist way, as part of stable systems or structures. Exploring professionalization within Mexico City hip-hop necessitates, instead, taking up Leidner’s (2010: 419) challenge for cultural sociologists to explore ‘the continual interplay between culture and economic conditions, structures and practices’, engaging the convergence between culture as artistic practice and as signifying system (Williams, 1981: 13). It is this challenge that I take up here.

Methods and Approach

The principal methods of this study are ethnographic. Research was carried out with Mexico City hip-hop artists between 2012 and 2019, totaling 15 months of sustained fieldwork engagement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 41 hip-hop artists, averaging an hour in duration. Participant observation was also carried out, in digital home studios (n=7); at live performances, including rap battles and activist events (n=24); and participating as a student at hip-hop workshops (n=5). Handwritten notes

made during participant observation were typed up later, usually on the same day as a given fieldwork encounter; the majority of participants were selected using snowball sampling. Where the initial years of my research (2012–2017) were concentrated on mostly unknown underground rappers active since the early 2010s (c. 30), my more recent research (2018–2019) has included established names in Mexican rap active since the early 2000s (c. 10). In line with the local hip-hop demographic, especially in the underground scene, most of these respondents are men (n=36), with a minority being women (n=5). The majority of the underground artists interviewed (n=24) inhabit what is often referred to as the Zona Oriente ('Eastern Zone'), a densely populated area from the north-east to the south-east of the Mexico City metropolitan area marked by insecurity, violence, and poverty.

I have carried out ongoing research with several key interlocutors since 2012. It was when one amateur underground rapper told me in 2015 of his desire to make a living from hip-hop, partly in response to the pressures of supporting a child, that I became especially interested in hip-hop as a professional pursuit. After professionalization as a topic presented itself through sustained ethnographic research, I conducted thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in order to immerse myself in the data collected. I transcribed my set of semi-structured interviews, established 'professionalization' as a key recurring theme within them, and reflected upon the ways they connected to the activities documented through participant observation. Linking these two forms of data allowed me to break down the term 'professionalization' and connect it to changes in the ways that hip-hop creativity is organized.

The diachronic nature of this research affords a perspective on the complex pressures that have driven the emergence of a 'professional' culture over time, and the different ways that 'being professional' may be interpreted. In this article, I draw from both the sociology of work and cultural sociology literature to navigate this complex, changing context for creative labor. Hip-hop practitioners often use their practice to construct and contest the 'professional'. Indeed, in recognition of the ways that hip-hop may be approached as, in itself, an alternative source of knowledge about professionalization (cf. Beer, 2014), the sociological analysis in this article is complemented by explorations of hip-hop music, videos, and lyrics. *Profesionalización* is explored as a discursive field for economic and creative action (Spillman, 2012), negotiated across hip-hop's multidisciplinary creative practices.

The Context: Shifting Hip-Hop Livelihoods in Mexico City

The recent development of hip-hop in Mexico has involved centralization alongside growth. While hip-hop emerged in scattered locations in 1990s Mexico – especially towards the north of the country – in recent years the country's hip-hop scene has begun to coalesce in Mexico City.³ Hip-hop has flourished, in particular, in the highly populated and economically disenfranchised communities at the city's eastern margins. In turn, established rappers from elsewhere in Mexico, such as Danger, Alemán, and Lng/SHT, relocated to Mexico City – now the pre-eminent hip-hop scene in the country – in the 2010s.

Early Mexican hip-hop was organized informally, oriented around the face-to-face exchange of cassette tapes, spontaneous performances in public places, and hip-hop crews – friendship groups for exploring the diverse branches of hip-hop. Where in the late 1990s hip-hop artists sought to perform at punk, rock and ska events, dedicated hip-hop events and venues emerged in the 2000s. By 2012, when I started to conduct research, a hip-hop scene was well established in Mexico City. As a member of Teokalli, a long-standing Mexico City crew, put it, ‘when we started to rap there was a lack of spaces. [Now] it’s different . . . it’s easier to get your music recorded, to get hold of a beat’ (Interview, Kubano, March 2019). This shift coincided with the growth of social networks and music sharing sites, and Mexico has since become one of the largest world markets for music streaming. Indeed, the growth of Mexican hip-hop since the turn of the millennium coincided with a collapse in the Mexican music industries, driven by digital piracy.

Where previous generations of rappers were more likely to criticize others for ‘selling out’, younger rappers are more proactive in making a living from music. ‘When rap started’, a longstanding Mexico City underground hip-hop artist told me in 2019, ‘the vibe was always about ‘it’s underground, you can’t make money from it’, [making money] was frowned upon’; newer generations, however, ‘were wired differently, and couldn’t give a damn’ about this underground ethic.⁴ Olvera Gudiño (2016) explores how Monterrey hip-hop artists piece together livelihoods from disparate elements such as making YouTube videos, charging for personalized tracks, running recording studios, and collaborating with government cultural institutions. Hip-hop entrepreneurship in Mexico City is similarly diverse. Direct music revenue is now dominated by streaming, with physical formats relegated to the role of a calling-card or keepsake; as one hip-hop entrepreneur put it, ‘really the only people who’ll buy [CDs] are true fans, people who are interested in feeling like a part of you’.⁵ Income from recorded music also comes from promotional songs made for brands or political parties; rappers often take steps to anonymize themselves within these songs by altering their vocal timbre. Selling beats is an increasingly viable source of income, as is charging to record and produce in a studio. Live hip-hop has also become a viable business for some, especially with the growth of rap battles, although the vast majority of live rap concerts still make little money. Hip-hop artists also retail branded items of clothing and spraypaint; indeed, graffiti has become increasingly important to hip-hop livelihoods within Mexico City, where some are paid to spraypaint walls in the colorful postrevolutionary muralist idiom (André, 2017). More experienced hip-hop artists have found a route into community and adult education, and some have even begun to provide hip-hop education within the schooling system: for instance, Danger Alto Kalibre has started an optional hip-hop course at a preparatory school in Mexico City.⁶

It is nonetheless worth noting that most hip-hop artists work other jobs. For most participants, then, hip-hop constitutes ‘aspirational labor’ at the boundary between leisure and work (Duffy, 2018: 1–11). This boundary is reflected in the music of bands at the margins of the ‘professional’. For instance, the song ‘El Regreso’ by Mexico City-based underground hip-hop act Conexión Mictlán musicalizes hip-hop creativity as a practice ancillary to work, which provides a level of liberation from it: ‘Travelling for

hours to get to work', the group raps, 'With music in my ears, freeing my mind/Taking the aerosol as a means of pressure/Creating atmosphere, between paint and profession'.

Changes in hip-hop livelihoods are, in turn, connected to an unsettled relationship between *profesionalización*, authenticity, and sociality, and the reorientation of the scene away from crews. Crews are defined by notions of *hermandad* ('fraternity'), friendship, and sociality. Following Spillman's terminology, the nonstrategic solidarity of *crews* has, in recent years, come to be challenged by *teams* – more strategic, objective-oriented groups driven by the demand for high-quality music videos and a professional image. Zirck Saucedo defined a crew as 'a group of people with the same interests that meets to carry out a project – but that project is not the face of just one person, the project is all of them'. Here, then, solidarity within the crew was in itself the point (cf. Spillman, 2012: 354). In turn, a 'team' was a vehicle for the professional promotion of Zirck's artistic image: 'In this case it's me, I'm the image of the project . . . it's a group that doesn't have a face, more like a work team, like a business, and in this case the business is me' (Interview, Zirck Saucedo, August 2019). This contrast existed, then, not only between formality and informality but also between individual and collective identity. Correspondingly, where early Mexican hip-hop was dominated by crews such as Control Machete, La Banda Bastón and Cartel de Santa, the genre's most successful recent acts are almost all solo rappers. 'Teams' coalescing around solo artists are distanced from the markers of authenticity pertaining to crews (those linked to social, shared experience); in another sense, they subordinate the social to the individual.

Harkness (2012) draws attention to destabilized 'situational authenticity' within hip-hop, in which notions of the 'real' are adapted to multiple positionalities relating to class, gender, and ethnicity. Hip-hop entrepreneurship in Mexico City has begun to unsettle established modes of authenticity and 'realness' within the hip-hop scene, formerly linked to the shared marginality and oppositional identity typically narrated by crews. This is witnessed in criticism of younger rappers' apparent inauthenticity: for instance, a longstanding Mexico City hip-hop participant criticized trap bands displaying, in videos, 'guns, weapons, women . . . they're just acting. Like I say, they rent the girls and the guns'.⁷ One's authenticity is increasingly tied to the 'realness' of one's entrepreneurial commitment, rather than of extra-musical 'everyday' life; contestations over the meaning of 'professionalism' are imbricated in these tensions.

Contestation over the terms of authenticity is reflected in two spheres of increasing importance to hip-hop livelihoods, briefly explored here. First, recent years have seen the growth of corporate-sponsored freestyle rap battles. These events are often compared to sport, generally featuring two rappers improvising insults and mockery of the other's abilities and authenticity. They can draw huge audiences, and are sometimes credited as the source of wider growth in the hip-hop scene.⁸ Their popularity has also spilled over onto the television, and some of their most celebrated exponents, such as Asesino and Aczino, have become famous. Nonetheless, battles are the subject of constant moral panic: many feel that they undermine the principles of the hip-hop movement. In turn, the success of these battles has undoubtedly created economic opportunities for hip-hop artists which pose a challenge to hip-hop artists living from other means. Yet most of my interviewees criticize freestyle rap battles in harsh terms. It was common to hear that battles encouraged *morbo* – 'titillation' or 'sensationalism' and that they encouraged

unhealthy competition over individual supremacy; some respondents mentioned cases of onstage rap battles escalating into physical conflict. They betrayed, as one rapper put it, the ‘basic values’ of ‘unity and respect’ within hip-hop culture: ‘instead of unity as a movement, a large organization, like a commune, there’s pure division. Why, because of the fight, the struggle over ego’.⁹

This speaker’s politicized allusion to ‘communes’ can be seen to stand in for a more direct experience of change: where most rappers had learned to freestyle informally, among friends – typically within crews – anxieties over rap battles arose as the format had been appropriated for a less fraternal and more individual, antagonistic setting. ‘It’s not an intellectual duel anymore’, one rapper told me, ‘it’s a duel about who’s the biggest badass [*chingón*] . . . it’s not a friendly duel anymore’.¹⁰ Equally, apologists for participation in rap battles occasionally claimed the practice as a form of hip-hop ‘professionalism’. This was often accompanied by a gesture towards disciplinary specialization or ‘jurisdiction’ (Abbott, 1988): so one rapper stated his respect for ‘all the MCs that freestyle, do battles, they’re very professional, very talented [*chingones*] – but my thing is writing’,¹¹ and another distanced himself from the studied, ‘talented’ freestylers: ‘I’m not at their level . . . There’s a method to battles, it’s something that’s becoming professionalized’.¹² Underlining how ‘rap battles have become more professionalized’, another rapper admired the apparently disinterested way that freestylers went about performance, in which onstage ‘it seems that [competitors] detest and hate each other’, but offstage ‘they greet each other like brothers’.¹³ This invocation of professionalism served to link freestyle rap battles to the familiar, fraternal contexts in which the practice had emerged. It also defused the moral panic surrounding rap battles by narrating hip-hop professionalism as detached entrepreneurship, defined by the outcome, not the content, of hip-hop livelihoods.

Second, where early Mexican hip-hop lyrics tended to engage shared everyday experiences of marginality, violence, and poverty (Tickner, 2008), the recent dominance of solo acts has coincided with the exploration of an increasingly rich range of subjective, internalized emotional experience.¹⁴ Correspondingly, hip-hop music videos now eschew the crowded visual aesthetic of the crew, tending to be sparsely populated, featuring only solo rappers, sometimes with a crew as background.¹⁵ Danger Alto Kalibre’s ‘No Voy A Morirme De Hambre’ [I’m Not Going To Die Of Hunger] depicts the rapper sitting alone atop a tractor (that is, a symbol of physical labor) while dramatizing making a living from hip-hop as a form of street authenticity. ‘Underground?’ the song opens, ‘where I come from is lower/From a poor neighborhood, workless working-class’. In this context, ‘not to struggle [*no luchar*] for what you love’, Danger raps, ‘is the worst illness’; ‘I grew up in the street/I’m not going to die of hunger’. This struggle is all-consuming: in a note of humor undercutting the song’s heroic entrepreneurialism, the rapper tells us that ‘I’m prepared, I sleep with my sneakers on’. The career of Danger, a rapper who draws livelihoods from pedagogy, streaming, and rap battles, is indicative of the multiple forms that hip-hop professionalism can assume; and, in particular, of how professionalization of the object and subject of hip-hop creativity may relate. In the following sections I offer an exploration of ‘object-forming’ and ‘subject-forming’ *profesionalización* in Mexico City. I am interested in exploring not only contrasting ways that the qualities of ‘professionalism’ are assigned, but combinations of

Spillman's 'strategic' and 'non-strategic' solidarity, which subordinate the latter to a new purpose outside of the group itself.

Professionalizing the Music Object

Profesionalización is often assumed to result from the rapid growth of music streaming in Mexico, linked to the increased importance of having high-quality music videos on YouTube, both as a marker of artistic seriousness and a source of income. Thus, one hip-hop artist, Doble-R, associated 'doing things in a very professional way' with 'taking all of my songs to different social networks, to Spotify, to iTunes, to YouTube, but with audio-visual content' (Interview, July 2019). Here, then, the 'professional' is understood principally as a quality of the art object itself. Professionalism was also narrated in aesthetic terms, related to a 'quality standard' in musical and visual production (Interview, Letras Sin Censura, June 2019). Rapper Jack Adrenalina, similarly, described being involved closely in the production of an album 'so that it comes out professionally, nicely, with quality' (Interview, May 2019). *Profesionalización* is thus connected to musical creation, oriented around the stable, reified, commodified music object. The 'professionalization' of the musical work is reflected in trends such as hip-hop artists making fewer recordings, re-recording old tracks in higher quality, and paying for the creation of high-resolution music videos.

A shift towards *profesionalización* is most clearly perceived within the creative practices of the recording studio. Prior's (2010) argument that digitalization has led to the creation of a generation of 'new amateur' producers is only partially borne out in this context: where underground hip-hop production had previously flourished in informal digital home studios run by part-time enthusiasts, recent years have seen a rise in well-equipped studios run by full-time producers. An increasing division of labor, and in particular the greater distance between beatmaking and producing made possible by digital media, is also typical of hip-hop production in the present. As one longstanding Mexico City rapper told me: 'now it's a lot of working at a distance, a beatmaker is in another state or even another country' (Interview, Don K-fe, August 2019). Making beats at a remove from others can connect with and reinforce notions of in-work independence; one full-time beatmaker told me that he began because 'I wanted to self-manage [*autogestionarme*] and not pay anyone else to do this' (Interview, Golpe El Ronin, March 2019). Changes in how music is conceptualized are especially notable during the production process itself.

In summer 2019 I accompanied Zirck Saucedo to a recording studio north of Mexico City's historic center. Zirck had booked a session with a producer he admired, planning to re-record a sensitive, romantic track which had been released in a successful YouTube video two years previously, with a contribution by an established name in the hip-hop scene. Zirck's decision to re-record this song reflected the demand for quality of recording over quantity; it also demonstrated the enduring power of celebrity, and the use of collaborations to intervene within patterns of prestige. We entered a well-equipped studio, with high-quality microphones, a soundproof booth, and a Mac running a digital audio workstation, in a room constructed on the roof of a house. Zirck swiftly warmed up and entered the booth to record his vocal parts. While he was fluent and well-rehearsed,

he was repeatedly unhappy with his takes, and commented to me at one point that he would usually record more quickly. An especially notable moment occurred part way through the recording: two friends of the producer entered with some recently repaired recording equipment, and the group left Zirck waiting in the booth while they looked over it and traded insults in jest. Feeling that this pause could heighten the anxieties Zirck felt about the session's comparatively high fee, I noted with interest what the rapper did next: as recording resumed, he began to broadcast the session live to his fans on Facebook, implicitly turning a disciplining, surveilling eye onto the producer he had hired.

When the session ended it was late at night, and Zirck and I went for tacos. While we were eating, the rapper started to voice ambivalence about professional production. Before, he told me, he would work alone with basic equipment, but this arrangement afforded him the time to make changes and experiment. By contrast, professional production required performers to adapt to the focused, limited time presented in professional studios. Further, while some producers contributed a detailed ear to recording, producers were often financially incentivized to accept the first viable take and move on, and they sometimes paid limited attention to what was being recorded. It was apparent that paying for studio time did not guarantee 'professionalism' in the sense of a recording process conducted according to the impersonal, disinterested 'service ideal' (Wilensky, 1964: 140), and distanced from participants' private lives, sociality, and kinship. Indeed, recording was always a personal, sociable, and interactive activity, and effective producers embraced and worked with this reality; what was at stake was not 'professional' production as emotionally neutral labor, but the nuanced and specific ways that patterns of emotional interaction helped to generate creativity.

Such pressured studio experiences were typical for rappers yet to make a living from music. Few unestablished rappers could afford to pay to record in professional studios, but it was common for rappers to record their first track after being invited by friends to record for free, or winning competitions offering a free recording session as the prize. Yet such recording sessions often deprioritized winners, since *profesionalización* implied a discrimination against non-paying clients. Artists who won studio time, or whose friends recorded them for free as a personal favor, found themselves recording late at night with producers motivated to record quickly, once paying artists had finished; they sometimes slept on the studio floor afterwards. While friendships or competitions promised to distribute access to professional recording more equitably, in practice they often recast pre-existing positions of economic power.

Music scholarship has long complicated notions of the musically 'good' by paying attention to the power relations involved in the creative process, as well as musical 'outcomes' in the form of works (Turino, 2008). The anxieties Zirck expressed about professional production did not gesture solely towards an idealized, sociable creative process, but could also reflect creative outcomes. For some respondents, producing tracks in a manner more typical of crews – that is, over a longer time period as a facet of sociability and leisure, generally in digital home studios and occasionally with the beatmaker present – could provide more opportunity for detail, variety, and unpredictability. Yet a creative process approaching beats, vocal recording, and production as bounded, non-interacting forms of labor, oriented around the creation of high-quality

‘professional’ musical recordings, could also involve distinctly informal, ‘non-professional’ studio practices.

Other encounters in the recording studio made evident how the transition to streaming, increasingly vital to hip-hop livelihoods, imposed a western notion of authorship on hip-hop artists. In July 2019, I visited a studio in Mexico City’s eastern reaches run by members of a hip-hop collective founded in 2013 called Conexión Mictlán. I arrived with Laiko, a rapper from Ecatepec, in the north-east of the city, with whom I have conducted research since 2012. Over several years, I have observed how increasing pressure to support a young family has seen Laiko, formerly an underground rapper uninterested in profiting from music, increasingly seek a livelihood from hip-hop. The studio itself was run by Doble-Ele, a member of Conexión Mictlán, and located within a shop selling tattoos, spraypaint and band merchandise. Charging to record rap was the lowest-performing aspect of the shop’s business as a whole. I had visited this shop multiple times, and seen Conexión Mictlán perform on several occasions. Today was a Sunday, the only day in the week that Laiko could make it; the plan was to record a song later released as ‘En La Pelea’ (In the Fight), but only Laiko, Doble-Ele, the band’s producer, and Wazon, a rapper and tattoo artist, arrived. Conexión Mictlán was notable for its size: the group’s 14 current members had never all been together in the same room and Laiko was planning to dismiss several members of the group for lack of participation. Such a numerous ensemble was impractical in Mexico City, where transport was slow and increasing in cost, and most live rap events had only three or four microphones: the case of this collective thus points towards logistical reasons for the declining influence of crews.

Soon after we arrived, the conversation turned to Spotify. Doble-Ele told Laiko that as the administrator for their label, Los Reyes Records, he had uploaded the band’s music to the streaming platform. This had made them what was, to date, a comically small amount of money: roughly five dollars so far, the equivalent of almost a hundred pesos. Both made joking reference, throughout the day, to this sum; it was ‘almost enough for a *caguama* [large bottle] of beer and some Cheetos’, Laiko joked at one point, invoking the familiar informal, sociable consumption rituals of recording. Nonetheless, the pair soon began to talk seriously about how to make money from Spotify. ‘I’ve told you before to upload your music’, Doble-Ele said to Laiko at one point. But this could cause problems: many of the tracks he had recorded with his former band, Instituto del Habla, were based on samples of traditional song, and the band was unsure about how copyright law would affect them. Uploading tracks first to Pandora – a platform which gave artists immediate warnings of copyright issues – was advanced as a pragmatic solution. Equally, the uncertainty was frustrating. One track, based on the folk song ‘La Llorona’, had over 8,000 views on YouTube (not an inconsequential tally for an underground outfit); yet confusion reigned here too, since this track had been based on an original arrangement of a folk tune rather than a sample.

I have observed many such conversations in hip-hop recording studios, almost always provoked by discussions about streaming services. These conversations were notable by their absence when I began research, and had been spurred by technological change: ‘before’, a member of Sociedad Café, one of Mexico’s earliest rap outfits, told me, ‘it was easy, we made beats with cassettes – [but] now you have to be really informed’.¹⁶ I have been aware of these legal complexities since 2013, when I noticed that a rapper I

worked with had unwittingly sampled a traditional folk song from outside of Mexico, complicating its categorization as *cultura popular* ('popular culture' pertaining to the nation which, according to Title 7 of the 1996 Ley Federal de Derechos de Autor, can be used freely). In the background is the history of informality in the Mexican hip-hop scene – facilitated by distribution in homemade cassettes and CDs – and a social acceptance of piracy (Cross, 2011). Such informality reflected presumptions that music made insufficient money to be noticeable, that rappers' use of pseudonyms provided legal protection, and of the centrality, until recently, of the informal face-to-face exchange of physical CDs for money at concerts. Informal practices have allowed underground beatmakers to directly reproduce samples, rather than creatively reworking or manipulating sound in order to avoid copyright breaches being detected.

In part because the issue was not of practical importance prior to the rise of YouTube and Spotify, there is much uncertainty within the hip-hop scene about the legality of sampling. A commonly invoked cautionary tale about the transition to streaming is that of Eptos Uno, an underground rapper from northern Mexico given a recording contract with Universal Music in 2014. When he signed, he had already recorded a full album, *Hacer Historia*, to release with the label; yet when Universal realized that much of this work used unregistered samples, the album release was delayed until early 2019 while copyright issues were resolved.¹⁷ The transition to streaming had also affected Sociedad Café. An individual representing a label contracted to distribute compact discs of one of their albums had, without their knowledge, placed their music onto streaming platforms under a separate account, and had received their royalties for years. When we spoke in 2019, Sociedad Café were attempting to re-establish authorial credits and their rights to future royalties, but this involved communicating with the many different streaming sites to which their music had been uploaded. The band spoke of early naivety about streaming platforms: 'one didn't know how streaming platforms worked, you'd first say 'ah great, our music's on Spotify' when Spotify was just beginning, no? You didn't know that Spotify was monetized'.¹⁸ I have also encountered cases of rappers who had unwittingly created tracks using plagiarized beats, only to see their track flagged when uploaded to Spotify, resulting in YouTube payments being automatically assigned to the owner of the original sample.

The latter situation can damage the credibility of beatmakers selling plagiarized beats, but it also highlights a lack of understanding of copyright law across the hip-hop scene. Confusion about the legality of sampling has been compounded by the circulation of myths – for instance, that one may legally sample up to 10 seconds of any recording. In response, rappers have resorted to shortcuts such as using Pandora or tune recognition app Shazam to detect copyright infringements. The emergence of new industry models can be seen to respond to uncertainty over copyright: for instance, Nugget Records, a label launched in 2019, provides its artists with access to a library of pre-registered, authenticated beats, while ensuring that beatmakers and producers receive a percentage of royalties.

The cases examined in this section show how the transition to streaming is connected to articulations of the 'professional' with the 'music object'. Spotify presents opportunities, but it also forms part of a coercive 'commodification apparatus' (Taylor, 2007), connecting professional advancement to proprietary notions of creativity. Equally, these

articulations are awkwardly related to informal sociality and collective creativity: full-time producers may produce ‘professional’ music with ‘unprofessional’ studio praxis; ‘professionalizing’ by moving one’s music onto streaming platforms often unwittingly exposes non-individual notions of intellectual property; the division of creative labor – especially the increasing distance between beatmakers and rappers – both defies collaborative ideas about authorship and creates difficulties for rappers seeking to avoid breaches of copyright law. Evidently, the establishment of a strategic objective – the ‘music object’ – does not eradicate non-strategic solidarity but recasts it. The next section addresses professionalization at the level of the subject, rather than the object.

Professionalizing the Hip-Hop Subject

In some settings, *profesionalización* accompanies proactive interventions into the hip-hop scene. One consequence of policy efforts since the late 1990s to democratize the cultural field in Mexico City (Urbina, 2012) has been the emergence of hip-hop workshops and courses, mostly within cultural centers run by the Mexico City government, which both encourage attendees to take the genre seriously and impart a series of ‘professional’ behaviors. The activities these workshops cover include: recording and mixing tracks; exercises to develop elocution; exercises to develop hip-hop performance and the expressive use of the body; discussions of the diversity of hip-hop livelihoods; and exercises to document and analyze music. Silva Londoño (2017) highlights how rap creativity effects a form of transformational subjectivization for women participants in Ciudad Juárez; in Mexico City hip-hop workshops, *profesionalización* is explored, negotiated, and developed at the level of the pedagogical subject. For instructors, meanwhile, imparting hip-hop workshops resembles a ‘pool profession’: a secondary means for rappers to make a living (Abbott, 1988: 131). It is also evident that hip-hop pedagogy has often been informed by anxieties surrounding freestyle rap battles. In 2015, for instance, a one-off workshop for young people was organized by several of my respondents from the underground scene, out of a fear that newer generations were imitating the antagonistic style of battles, rather than valuing consciousness-raising through hip-hop.

During research, I participated in hip-hop educational workshops striking a balance between embodied and abstract hip-hop knowledge. One weekly workshop I attended in 2019 was held free of charge in a government-administrated cultural center towards the city’s eastern belt. Called ‘Poesía Con Actitud’ (Poetry With Attitude), it was run by Van-T, a member of longstanding hip-hop crew Magisterio, who had been running hip-hop workshops for a decade. Seeing the workshop as an expansion of ‘cultural rights’, Van-T’s approach valued the ludic and spontaneous, and was oriented around games: for instance, in the first week of the workshop we were asked to create rhymes containing words written onto cards; in an exercise several weeks later, we repeated rhymes in different tones, to develop confidence and range in performance. In these workshops, Van-T told me, *profesionalización* was encouraged as a form of ‘being responsible . . . you want someone to listen to your music, make it for someone to listen to’. This professional habitus manifested itself in challenging participants both to communicate effectively and develop regular performance habits: ‘when we go to play, there’s a fixed agenda, there’s a rigid preparation for it, we rehearse at a certain time. Nobody can arrive and learn the

text there'.¹⁹ Equally, Van-T's longstanding workshops had moved beyond an early orientation around the production of a track. Instead, the more recent focus on performance encouraged 'being professional' as a form of comportment linked to values of self-actualization, self-management, and the development of a personal voice.

Where Van-T's workshops had moved away from the bounded, reified music object, other workshops rooted professional practice in abstractions. It was common for hip-hop workshops to teach students to construct a four-beat, four-line verse. While in most cases students learned to do this orally, one workshop I attended opened with a class teaching students how to notate rhythm using the western standard notation system. This system was adapted to hip-hop rhythms; for instance, two consecutive eighth notes were used to denote a trap rhythm (two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth-note rest). Staff notation was used as a heuristic framework to structure freestyling to certain beats. Arguably, learning staff notation was not especially useful in this context – most rappers learn to count orally – but doing so at the beginning of courses demonstrated the 'abstracting ability to define old problems in new ways' which Abbott suggests is vital to the 'power of the professions' knowledge systems' across disparate occupational contexts (1988: 30). Just as the emergence of abstractions in the form of written notation and 'academic work on the writing of counterpoint and harmony' aided the construction of musical professionalism in Europe (1988: 54), so incorporating staff notation into hip-hop pedagogy gestured towards models of musical professionalism likely to attract prestige.

In addition to constructing hip-hop as a serious, formal pursuit, however, this exercise suggested that the creative process could be slow and considered, as well as spontaneous and reactive. This notion was central to the workshop's self-positioning and drew an especially sharp contrast with freestyle rap battles. As news of workshops spread, so did criticism that hip-hop was learned informally, in 'the street', presenting the instructor with the problem of differentiating and legitimizing formal hip-hop pedagogy:

In the street you do things without knowing why you're doing them, you do them out of imitation without knowing the foundation of what you're doing . . . what a workshop, educational development helps you with is to know what you're doing.

Participating in this workshop thus promised a more deliberative insight into hip-hop as a way of life. Legitimization was achieved by appropriating hip-hop's origins, relating them to the autonomous professional capacitated to exercise independent judgement (Wilensky, 1964: 146–7). It was also achieved through language: instructors on this workshop distinguished between *raperos* ('rappers') – who focused on the musical practice to the detriment of hip-hop as a lifestyle – and *hiphoperos* ('hip-hoppers'), who saw hip-hop as a wide-ranging cultural practice. Through another lens still, this 'knowing what you're doing' strongly resembles Spillman's 'strategy' (2012); thus, hip-hop pedagogy is also legitimized here as a rejection of non-strategic action.

The achievement of 'professionalism' at the level of the individual, then, could involve multiple divergent practices. It also connected to certain kinds of tensions. One workshop I attended in east Mexico City combined pedagogy from several different branches of hip-hop, including classes on rap, deejaying, and production imparted by different instructors. *Profesionalización* was a core value of this workshop: students

were told that, if the instructor could live from hip-hop, so could they. The tensions within this drive towards *profesionalización*, however, were made apparent one week when an instructor failed to show up, forcing the cancellation of a class. This was part of a pattern of impunctuality which was causing the workshop to lose students. The instructor present was angry, and insulted his colleague in strong terms, but he also drew this colleague's unreliability into a collective narrative of national inferiority, rooted in the everyday: 'I don't know how it is in your country, but here in Mexico people are lazy [*huevo*na]'. While '[t]he Mexican goes about criticizing the government this, the system that, the President this', he said, 'it's a total lie. The Mexican likes conformity. He doesn't like to work hard or risk his time to achieve success'. As in many settings in which workers' status as 'professionals' is in question, this occurrence was transformed into an 'atrocious story' turning 'a straightforward complaint or slight [into] a moral tale inviting all right-thinking persons (the audience) to testify to the worth of the teller as against the failings of the other characters in the story' (Dingwall, 2008: 42). I was drawn into this conversation in a certain way, as interlocutor for the 'First World', whose success was (in my view incorrectly) attributed to superior individual trustworthiness.

This conversation illustrated one way in which *profesionalización* could contribute to a certain ordering of the political, presenting a solution to individualized corruption and unreliability. A tendency in Mexico to 'turn history into psychodrama', ascribing national problems to apparent defects in the national psyche, has been long noted, especially among the country's elite classes (Lomnitz-Adler, 1992: 2; Schmidt, 1976). The phenomenon of so-called *malinchismo* – a national inferiority complex narratively rooted in the colonial encounter – makes the personal political in a certain way; everyday habits and interactions are taken as the roots of wider societal problems. This politicization of the everyday is occasionally reinforced in Mexican underground hip-hop. For example, the 2010 track 'Farsante' ['Fakers'] by Neza-based outfit Letras Sin Censura criticizes duplicity across private and public spheres, collapsing together political and personal deception; where politicians 'want to sell you pure lies', and 'use masks . . . so that you fall into the spiderweb of their [electoral] campaign'. This deception is conflated with that of insincere friends who 'say they're your pal' but betray you later, and participants within the hip-hop scene whose actions 'with the lyrics of your songs, show contradictions'. Broader societal problems are rooted, here, in individual untrustworthiness.

In this sense, there was a dialogue between apparently innocuous, apolitical aspects of hip-hop pedagogy such as teaching students to prepare 'responsibly' for performance, and wider debates about education, subjectivity, and citizenship (Woodford, 2014). Although the atrocious story just cited draws a comparatively extreme narrative of national inferiority, its criticism of political protest, along with the implicit message that subject-forming hip-hop professionalism presented an alternative means of societal advancement, was far from *outré*. *For Danger Alto Kalibre, politics occurred 'in such high spheres' that 'it's very difficult to know a general truth'; by contrast, it was easier to 'criticize the government for everything, because that takes away responsibility from you as an individual and as a citizen' (Interview, June 2018). Hip-hop entrepreneurialism was thus rooted in a gesture of epistemic closure, excluding politics from the knowable. Similarly, Iztapalapa-based rapper, producer, beatmaker, and tattoo artist Etrack felt that 'if I wait for the government to give me something, I'll never get it . . . I prefer to be

striving every day to pay for things than to be crying and complaining about the country'. Although aware of deficiencies in Mexico's public services and political system, Etrack excluded politics from the terrain of hip-hop professionalism, explicitly connecting a belief in 'the power of work and constancy' with a refusal of public services: 'I can also . . . start to earn more, be autonomous', the rapper told me; 'not depend on the police or the [public] health sector, if my son gets sick I take him to a private hospital'. Equally, the full development of the self-reliant individual implied a fuller social awareness: in Mexico, Etrack said, 'socially we're not educated to get along . . . we think of the individual most of the time' (Interview, Etrack, July 2019).

The stakes of the *profesionalización* of the hip-hop subject were not, then, solely economic, but pointed towards ongoing national debates about education, subject formation, and political citizenship (Durkheim, 1992 [1957]; Lomnitz-Adler, 2001: xvi–xviii). Narrating the value of the pedagogical practice discussed in this section involved reconfiguration of this creative field in opposition to imagined nonstrategic, informal action. In turn, where the creation of 'professional' musical works did not necessitate 'professional' actions, the formation of the professional subject through education was linked to a decentering of the music object and, in some cases, a renewed emphasis on live performance. The example of the frustrated hip-hop pedagogue mentioned earlier does, however, show that for participants in the hip-hop scene, *profesionalización* may help to narrate value and engage in boundary work, amidst sweeping changes in the organization of the hip-hop movement.

Conclusion: Professionalism, Exclusion and Solidarity

In the second section of this article, I observed that 'professional', in social research into music, is often used implicitly as an antonym of 'amateur'. Yet this leaves much to be clarified. *Profesionalización* in Mexico City hip-hop takes multiple forms, partly driven by the growing importance of streaming platforms, partly associated with the expansion of freestyle rap battles, and partly linked to pedagogy. Its appeal reflects economic precarity: the *need* for hip-hop livelihoods, as well as their availability. I have sought to marry such economic accounts of cultural production with an account of the ways that culture-as-signifying-system is drawn upon and shaped (Williams, 1981: 13), suggesting that talk of *profesionalización* is attractive because it presents a slippage between adjective, verb and noun. *Profesionalización* denotes aesthetic features of music, forms of commoditization of music, musical subjectivization, and organization around music. This multiplicity affords open-ended forms of boundary work amid uncertainty and change.

Part of the purpose of this article is to document, ethnographically and in detail, complex structural changes in a global hip-hop scene that had not previously been documented. Yet I also respond to this complexity by charting multiple paths through it. For this reason, I have proposed a conceptual distinction between object-forming and subject-forming professionalization, referring to forms of professionalization which are variously focused on the 'object' of music-making (in this context, the digitized musical commodity), or on the 'subject' of music-making (individual musicians). This ideal-typical object-forming/subject-forming distinction does not imply a straightforward lack of the other, but a contrast in

objective; thus, for instance, music ‘objects’ may form as part of workshops which more explicitly seek to form new, more professional subjects, and the same individuals draw livelihoods from both. These forms transition away from what Spillman (2012: 354) terms ‘nonstrategic solidarity’, here represented by the crew. They do so, however, by locating the ‘professional’ in different places; by texturing professionalism in contrasting ways; and by maintaining camaraderie in a more constrained form. This state of transition is at the root of several tensions, documented here: the need to distinguish formal hip-hop education from informal transmission by standardizing hip-hop pedagogy; and the tension between the up-and-coming rapper recording according to ‘professional’ standards and the producer’s camaraderie with individuals other than their client. Building on Spillman’s insight connecting strategic and non-strategic action, this article concludes that ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ may not be understood in straightforward mutual opposition.

As demonstrated, *profesionalización* has accompanied a transition away from the collective, fraternal experience of the crew. Hip-hop professionalism was allied to individual, subjective experience, and often intertwined with a notion of neoliberal entrepreneurialism. Yet it was evident from participant observation that one could not be a hip-hop professional alone: strategic and non-strategic action were complexly interdependent. ‘Professional’ status required the right kind of ‘art world’ (Becker, 1982). This is especially clear from the second half of my account, from August 2019, of the day that I accompanied Zirck to his performance in Los Reyes/La Paz:

Research diary, August 2019: After a bag check we enter a house with a big patio at the back, where the concert is taking place. We have to cross a swimming pool – green and full of refuse – to get to the performance area. We arrive just before 8pm, and the place is packed; the event has only just started, although it was scheduled to begin four hours ago. Zirck was expecting to perform fairly soon after arriving, but in the end we wait two hours while various rappers take the stage to sing about life in the barrio: police repression, substance abuse, criminal activity. It’s a worrying moment: we know this area is a dangerous place to be after dark. Zirck’s performance doesn’t go down well, despite repeated efforts to involve the audience; I get the sense from talking to a few people that his music is rejected as overly commercial. In making sense of this public’s indifference after his performance, Zirck gestures towards professional performance principle; turning the gaze inwards, he says that days like this get you down, but he’s proud that they gave a good account of themselves onstage.

It’s 10:40pm when we set off towards the Los Reyes metro; because there are several of us, a decision is made to walk. As we pass through a dark and empty street, a young man passes by us dressed in dark clothes and a hood, then turns and begins to walk towards us, and Zirck calls for us to run. Some of our number say, afterwards, that they saw him with a firearm in his pocket. We turn the corner and then make a left, to a fairly public place with a few people around; here we approach several taxis, but the drivers see us agitated and refuse to help. Finally a motorickshaw arrives and takes us, shaken but unharmed, to the metro station.

Collectively, we start to catastrophize: What would have happened if our would-be assailant had managed to rob us and – especially – take Osvaldo’s expensive equipment for live DJing? Participants’ difficulty in safely transporting equipment to this insecure hip-hop heartland is telling: how to put on a professional show in such risky circumstances?

This encounter highlighted practical challenges of *profesionalización* in the contemporary hip-hop scene. *Profesionalización* was a choice both dependent on collective action and reflecting structural inequality: being professional became increasingly risky

in insecure settings, in which the unreliability of some could create danger for others. Hip-hop professionals were less self-sufficient, and more dependent on wider social conditions, than many wished to admit. The challenge remained, then, how to claim the contingent agency related to the ‘professional’ without undermining shared, collaborative creativity; how to narrate hip-hop professionalism beyond the misleading image of the heroic, neoliberal entrepreneur.

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Notes

1. Some names and details have been changed.
2. A rap battle, or battle rap, is a typically improvised event in which multiple rappers freestyle competitively in front of a live audience, often incorporating boasts and insults.
3. Hip-hop’s development elsewhere, especially in northern Mexico, is explored by Olvera Gudiño (2016) and Silva Londoño (2017).
4. Interview, Venomz, Letras Sin Censura, June 2019.
5. Interview, Etrack, July 2019.
6. <https://www.ritmourbano.com.mx/2019/08/danger-impartira-clases-de-rap-en-secundaria-de-cdmx/> (accessed 9 October 2020).
7. Interview, Vyrus, Sociedad Café, August 2019.
8. Interview, Asfalto, June 2019.
9. Interview, Corona, Letras Sin Censura, June 2019.
10. Interview, Charko Vega, July 2019.
11. Interview, Preck Castillo, July 2019.
12. Interview, Zirck Saucedo, August 2019.
13. Interview, Doble-R, July 2019.
14. This is especially notable in the recent music of Tino El Pinguino, Akil Ammar, and Ximbo. The greater affective breadth of contemporary Mexican hip-hop is linked to the rising (but still minority) influence of women rappers, and the rejection of the hyper-masculinist frame typical of early hip-hop (cf. Malcomson, 2019; Silva Londoño, 2017).
15. For a contrast, see Sociedad Café’s 2013 video ‘Leales Al Juego’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCu6oQxQaMQ> (accessed 1 November 2020), versus Ximbo’s 2020 offering ‘Mar Abierto’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0wLzPSsoSU> (accessed 1 November 2020).
16. Interview, Vyrus, Sociedad Café, 5 August 2019.
17. https://www.vice.com/es_latam/article/7xygpd/llego-el-momento-de-hacer-historia-escucha-el-esperado-disco-de-epptos-uno (accessed 13 November 2019).
18. Interview, Don K-fê, Sociedad Café, 5 August 2019.
19. Interview, Van-T, August 2019.

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Author biography

Dr Andrew Green is Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow’s School of Culture and Creative Arts. His interdisciplinary research engages intersections between music, activism, politics and the creative industries. He has published work in peer-reviewed journals including *Media, Culture, and Society*, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, *Popular Music and Society*, *Popular Music*, and the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.