



DEVIANT POLITICS: HIP HOP AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE AGAINST HYPER-CRIMINALIZATION AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Deviant politics: *el hip hop como forma de resistencia contra
la hiper-criminalización y la violencia estructural*

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this research is to examine how hip hop music provides a place for what Rios (2011) calls “deviant politics” where young men put on a tough front associated with hyper-masculinity in response to the way society excludes them on the base of their race/ethnicity and low-income status. The concept of deviant politics will be used to examine how the role of hip hop music in Juárez shapes resistance to hyper-criminalization in order to recover from structural violence. The study addresses two objectives:

1. To examine the hyper-criminalization of Juárez MCs by examining the structural context in which they live and the deviant labels attached to this group attributed to their status as young, male and poor.
2. To illustrate how hip hop is a form of resistance, or what Rios (2011) calls deviant politics, used to combat stigma and the lack of legitimate (educational and work) opportunities.

This study consists of 16 in-depth interviews with Juárez MCs; content analysis is used to interpret the lyrics of four of their songs.

KEYWORDS: hyper-criminalization, structural violence, hip hop, Juárez.



RESUMEN: El propósito de esta investigación es examinar cómo la música hip hop proporciona un lugar para lo que Ríos (2011) llama «Deviant Politics» donde los jóvenes adoptan una imagen ruda que está asociada con la hiper-masculinidad como una respuesta a la exclusión de la sociedad debido a su raza/etnia y su estatus socioeconómico. El concepto de «Deviant Politics» se utilizará para examinar cómo el papel de la música hip hop en Juárez da forma a la resistencia contra la hiper-criminalización para recuperarse de la violencia estructural. Se abordarán dos objetivos:

1. Trato de examinar la hipercriminalización de los MC en Juárez, examinando el contexto estructural en la que viven atribuido a su condición de hombres, de jóvenes, y de bajos recursos.
2. Voy a ilustrar cómo el hip hop es una forma de resistencia, o lo que Ríos (2011) llama «Deviant Politics», que se utiliza para combatir el estigma y la falta de oportunidades en la educación y buenos empleos.

Este estudio consta de 16 entrevistas con jóvenes juarenses. He utilizado el análisis de contenido para interpretar cuatro letras de canciones de MC de Juárez.

PALABRAS CLAVE: hipercriminalización, violencia estructural, hip hop, Juárez.

RESUM: El propòsit d'aquesta recerca és examinar com la música hip hop proporciona un lloc per a allò que Ríos (2011) anomena «Deviant Politics», en què els joves adopten una imatge ruda que està associada amb la hipermasculinitat com a resposta a l'exclusió de la societat a causa de la seua raça/ètnia i del seu estatus socioeconòmic. El concepte de Deviant Politics s'utilitzarà per a examinar el paper de la música hip hop a Juárez, i com dóna forma a la resistència contra la hipercriminalització per a recuperar-se de la violència estructural. S'hi abordaran dos objectius:

1. Tracte d'examinar la hipercriminalització dels MC a Juárez, i examine el context estructural en el qual viuen, atribuït a la seua condició d'homes, de joves de pocs recursos.



2. Il·lustre com el hip hop és una forma de resistència, o el que Ríos (2011) anomena Deviant Politics, que s'utilitza per a combatre l'estigma i la falta d'oportunitats en l'educació i bones ocupacions.

Aquest estudi consta de 16 entrevistes amb joves de Juárez. He utilitzat l'anàlisi de contingut per a interpretar quatre lletres de cançons de MC de Juárez.

PARAULES CLAU: hipercriminalització, violència estructural, hip hop, Juárez.

Although levels of violence had fallen sharply by 2015, the situation of young men in Juárez had worsened. The director of the *Casa Promoción Juvenil*, María Teresa Almada, reported a 26 percent increase in the incarceration rates of young and poor men (Martínez, 2015) and explained that the parents of these young men are required to pay high fines to free their sons, a tasking endeavor for families living in poverty. Police officers profile young men by their dress and general appearance when they are simply walking around their neighborhoods, thereby unjustly criminalizing them (Martínez, 2015). Such encounters with the police have on occasions resulted in death. In March 2015 Ivan, a 16 year-old, was killed by a police officer and to this day the details of his death are unclear. Ivan had previously been arrested in his neighborhood, and on the day of his murder he had also been detained. The official story is that the police officer killed him when he tried to escape; however, Ivan's brother said he received a call from Ivan asking for money to prevent his arrest by the police officer (Chavez, 2015).

The research objectives of this study are two-fold. First, I seek to examine the hyper-criminalization of Juárez MCs by examining the structural context in which they live and the deviant labels attached to them attributed to their status as young, poor, and male. Second, I will illustrate how hip hop is a form of resistance, or what Ríos (2011) calls deviant politics, used to combat the stigma and the lack of legitimate (educational and work) opportunities. The data for this study comes from two sources. First, I use content analysis to analyze some of the lyrics of the songs the young MCs perform along the Mexican-U.S. border. This part of the analysis will help to contextualize the



structural violence the Juárez youth encounter in their daily lives. Second, in-depth interviews with sixteen MCs will highlight their structural oppression and show how they use hip hop as a form of globalization from below.

Structural Violence

Juárez youth live under conditions of structural violence. Departing from a focus on individual forms of violence, I draw from the structural violence perspective first coined by Galtung (1969). Structural violence allows for a macro-level examination of violence and extends micro-level definitions of violence to include social injustices (Morales and Bejarano, 2009). Structural violence is largely indirect because decision makers focus on profits and care little about the vulnerable poor and working class populations (Morales and Bejarano, 2009).

Chasin (2004) described the differences between structural and interpersonal violence, making the key distinction that structural violence has more victims than interpersonal violence. However victims of structural violence are not as aware of the reasons behind their victimization. Indeed, even if victims know they are suffering from violence it is not easy to identify their perpetrators. It is very difficult to create awareness of the cycle of structural violence because it is the entire system that is broken, and even when communities fight against it, the decision makers still hold the power, and the victims' lives are at risk (Chasin, 2004).

Hip Hop in Juárez

As a border town Juárez has ready access to American culture, which has given rise to in a unique style that is neither fully American nor fully Mexican but a mixture of both (Anzaldúa, 1987). So far, scant attention has been paid to the meaning of hip hop along the Mexican-U.S. border. One exception is the work of Sanchez (2014), who showed that hip hop is part of Juárez's underground culture: rap artists do not have the opportunity to market their music commercially and they become known as underground artists. Sanchez (2014) concluded that Juárez MCs represent a counter-hegemonic resistance to the lack of opportunities for low-income youth.



I draw on the limited research on hip hop along the border to discuss how youths in a border city transform a global culture into a local culture. I analyze the way in which young men in Juárez are criminalized structurally and at the micro-level because they are poor and male. I then discuss how young MCs respond to such criminalization through hip hop.

Literature review and theoretical discussion

Hyper-Criminalization

Rios (2011) studied how young men in poor neighborhoods of Oakland, California, are predestined by society to incarceration, or in the worst case, murder by gang members or the police. Because the city is highly industrialized and has increasing numbers of poor immigrants, the neoliberalism of the 1980s further marginalized poor neighborhoods and citizens through rising unemployment (Rios, 2011). Rios (2011) defines criminalization as:

[...] the process by which styles and behaviors are rendered deviant and are treated with shame, exclusion, punishment, and incarceration. In this study, criminalization occurred beyond the law; it crossed social contexts and followed young people across an array of social institutions, including school, the neighborhood, the community center, the media and the family. (p. xiv)

Therefore, hyper-criminalization is created first by the desire of law enforcers to control young men in poor neighborhoods (Rios 2011). The media then spreads this stereotype of bad boys in the streets, with the result that whole communities internalize the stigma of men labeled as criminals merely because of the way they dress. Rios pays close attention the way their *cholo* appearance makes young men an easy target. The school system is an important element in the hyper-criminalization process when young men are expelled from school for bad behavior.

Rios' (2011) research is important because he takes the perspective of these young men's stories, claiming that the news always gives the police and law enforcers' side of the story, but the other side is never heard. Rios (2011) argues that marginalization ignites a desire to understand social processes. In his study he found that "criminalization [...] also sparked a deep desire to know why they [the young men] were targeted, and some developed a



keen sense of dissent, often informal and occasionally more formal” (p. 123). According to Oliver (2008), “in the context of mass incarceration generated by repression of the social movements of the mid-twentieth century, we have to pay attention to the new and unique forms of resistance and mobilization taking place among marginalized populations” (p. 123). Katz (1999) states that the culture of poverty is the main reason why poor youth have been targeted as criminals since the 1960s, when research into poverty by ethnographers, sociologists, political scientists, and other social scientists laid the blame on minorities from low income families, arguing that the poor were deviant and were driven into criminal activities by low incomes (Katz, 1999). Single mothers and people on welfare were targeted as immoral and lazy (Katz, 1999). The stigma of this label gives this help a double connotation that young have to deal with in society (Katz, 1999). This kind of research legitimized hyper-criminalization of the young poor in the United States.

Low income youth, targeted as a risk, use the code of the street to survive. Rios (2011) quotes sociologist Elijah Anderson (1999, p. 326) on the importance of this code:

“The ‘code of the street’ is not the goal or product of any individual’s actions but is the fabric of everyday life, a vivid and pressing milieu with which all local residents must shape their personal routines, income strategies, and orientations to schooling, as well as their mating, parenting, and neighbor relations.” Preemptively attacking an enemy to prevent future victimization is a key element of the code. (p. 55)

In their neighborhoods, it is important for these young men to look tough when they are up against the criminal justice system (Rios, 2011). A tough appearance is a double-edged sword for young men trying to survive in high crime neighborhoods. On one hand it brings them respect, but on the other, US police officers cannot distinguish between innocent youths and those involved in gangs and drugs (Rios, 2011). When innocent young men are targeted as criminals, they internalize the shame and feelings of stigmatization that often lead them to commit crime in the future. The code of the street is embedded in the language, body language, and music that are used to create images of the tough male (Katz, 1999).



Deviant Politics

The present thesis draws on Rios' concept of deviant politics to understand the criminalization of young men in Juárez and their adoption of hip hop as a medium to speak against injustice. Rios (2011) coined the term deviant politics to describe the forms of resistance—such as political activism, oppositional consciousness, and at times committing other crimes—that poor young men of color use to protest the deviant labels imposed on them by society. Unfair treatment and punishment leads young people to commit conscious acts of resistance (Rios, 2011). These forms of resistance developed because young men of color are not passive about the deviant labels that society imposes on them and their relatives. Young men of color from low income neighborhoods are fully aware of the way the police and other institutions in society abuse their power (Rios, 2011). These deviant politics surface as ways of “getting back at the system” at the risk of being incarcerated, being shot or abused by police officers, and/or facing violence from other youths in the same situation through gang violence (Rios, 2011).

In the context of Juárez, deviant politics surface through music, dance, and dress, not only through crime or activism (Rios, 2011). Deviant politics can lead young men to adopt a tough front that is associated with hyper-masculinity as a response their exclusion by society due to their race/ethnicity and low-income statuses. Tough fronts help young men survive in the streets and gain a sense of self-empowerment (Rios, 2011). Against this background, hip hop became the medium for young men to express their tough fronts (Rios, 2011). In addition to hip hop, there are also themes of deviant politics in the literature on youth rebellion. Oliver (2008), for example, argued that resistance among criminalized youth can take two different paths: 1) committing crime without knowing the real reason for oppression, or 2) taking action against the system once they become aware of the root causes of their oppression. Oliver (2008) states:

There is individual dissent and collective crime, and both are common. The more repressive a system, the more dissent takes the form of individual, often anonymous, acts of resistance.... We need to ask how oppressed people can gain redress under conditions of extreme repression and to understand the forms that resistance can take when the possibility of direct resistance is blocked. (p. 1)



Drawing from Oliver (2008), deviant politics is a way for young MCs to re-empower themselves and to display forms of resistance through music. Music provides opportunities for changing the social structure through political participation—participation that is usually inaccessible to these young men.

The association between hip hop and resistance has also been established by black feminist scholar bell hooks (1994), who argues that white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy are to blame for condemning poor young men of color. In her words, “gangsta rap celebrates the world of the material, the dog-eat-dog world where you do what you gotta do to make it even if it means fucking over folks and taking them out. In this world view killing is necessary for survival” (124). Ironically, it is largely young white men who consume the type of gangsta rap that hooks is referring to, even though young men of color are those who have suffered stigmatization and criminalization.

Methodology

Content Analysis

I used content analysis to interpret four song lyrics from Juárez MCs. The songs selected allude to structural violence or masculinity and either came from YouTube and SoundCloud, or were sent to me by the participants in the study. On reading the lyrics the patterns that emerged were of violence in the neighborhoods, police officers abusing their power, lack of education and employment opportunities, and stigmatization by law enforcers and society in general. My analysis drew connections between the context in Juárez, the development of social consciousness among the youth, and how music is used as a form of expression.

In-Depth Interviews

Snowball sampling techniques were used to select participants. The interviews were conducted with 16 hip hop artists (12 = men and 4 = women, aged between 18 and 35) residing along the U.S.-Mexico border. Interview-



ees were given the option to remain anonymous or if they wished, to use their artistic name in this study.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using qualitative thematic coding in the N*VIVO qualitative software. I recorded each interview and transcribed it verbatim. The interview guide had three general themes: 1) life histories and individual goals, 2) goals and aspirations as MCs, and 3) perceptions about the Mexican government, law enforcement, and their experience as young people living in Juárez. Codes included themes such as criminalization, violence, and lack of opportunities. The data was re-coded after the initial coding. In this second coding I identified themes that emerged from the data such as instances of deviant politics.

Findings

The first section of the findings focuses on outcomes of the content analysis of musical lyrics to contextualize the study. Recurring themes within the music and the connection with the theoretical framework are discussed. The second section examines how poverty interlocks with age to shape opportunities (or lack thereof) and hyper-criminalize the young men living in Juárez. Data obtained from participant observations and in-depth interviews form the basis of this analysis. In the third section, I examine what Rios (2011) refers to as deviant politics and apply it to the case study.

Content Analysis: The Message of Hip Hop

To contextualize my study, I analyzed the lyrics of hip hop songs performed by MCs from Juárez. Common themes in the lyrics were stigmatization, discrimination, and the exclusion of youth in low-income neighborhoods in Juárez. The violence they describe is structural: some examples are living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and family disintegration and instability because parents are forced to work long hours for the family to survive, and are too physically exhausted from their strenuous *maquiladora* jobs to spend qual-



ity time with their children. Such lifestyles drive young people to seek comfort among their peers and increase the likelihood of them joining a neighborhood gang.

Structural Violence and Blocked Opportunities

In this section I analyze the MC lyrics that highlight structural violence or macro-level inequalities. A society that is designed to provide opportunities for some groups and block legitimate opportunities for others is a form of structural violence (Morales and Bejarano, 2009). Education is one factor contributing to inequality at the structural-level. In Mexico, education is free and compulsory for all teenagers; however, there are not enough government sponsored schools for all students. To secure a place in public middle and high schools, students must pass an exam, and those who do not access a place in the public system must enroll in a private school and pay monthly fees. Low income students need to find work to finance their education in a labor market with restricted opportunities and poor wages. Pok 37, a member of Juárez hip hop group *Elites Squad*, sings about the lack of opportunities for poor youth along the border:

La verdad no avanza. Mi ciudad no prospera. No miro esperanza y la gente aún espera / con las manos abiertas sin darse cuenta que las oportunidades están muertas.

They have a very bleak outlook on the opportunities in Juárez. In the above lyrics, the MCs describe how they have no hope, although others in the city still have some expectations. While perspectives of structural violence stress that people are not always aware of who their oppressor is (Galtung, 1969), the social realities facing the MCs open their eyes to the structural inequalities.

Ratas con Corbata by Adrian and Axel also passionately describes the lack of hope in Juárez.

The MCs refer to the structural violence exacerbated by the way the government ignores its citizens and exerts excessive social control. Living in low income neighborhoods they have become aware of the inequalities of a legal system that treats poor people unequally:



La fragancia de la democracia es el control del pueblo basado en la ignorancia / desconsolado por ser menos ante un juez y nominado al desempleado del mes / No quiero ser presidente. Todos son unas ratas. Nos humillan, nos denigran, con su división de castas.

Their songs describe how the government portrays Mexico as a democracy while it is actually corrupt, treats the poor unjustly, and robs its own citizens.

Indeed, structural violence in the form of governmental corruption is a common theme among MCs. Pok 37 and MC Crimen's lyrics below reflect on the harsh reality facing low income youth when they have no money to pay for school and in some cases, even food:

No hay prioridad para mi gente, ni comida en la mesa. Van sin darse cuenta, que el pueblo no interesa. / Vivimos un sistema sin pies ni cabeza. No es suficiente un rebote de gobierno.

In this song, Pok 37 and MC Crimen stress the lack of structural opportunities such as education, employment, or food for the poor. Knowing firsthand what it is like to live in conditions of poverty they feel the government does not care about people in their situation. Indeed, at the time they wrote this song they did not have the money to pay for their high school education.

Similarly, Adrian Kamikaze and Axel are two MCs who also live in harsh economic conditions and criticize the government for implementing a structurally violent system that does not work for the majority of the people. Indeed, the government system only benefits those in power who attend expensive and prestigious schools, travel, and buy luxury cars and houses:

Bajo este país los altos funcionarios van a óperas y estudian en París. / Bajo la mejor educación tienen buenos coches y una buena mansión / ¿Y cuántos niños diarios mueren por desnutrición? / Eso no sale en los discursos... Ni cuántos abandonaron la escuela / por falta de recurso y aumentos de intereses / Es un privilegio que se dan sólo burgueses. / Nosotros no alcanzamos y el señor presidente ya se lavó las manos / Yo sólo pregunto cuando vuelve el trabajo.

Even though these young MCs—Axel kamikaze, Adrian, Pok 37 and MC Crimen—lack a formal education they are critical thinkers and are aware of



the structural inequalities that shape their life courses. However, they still need a formal education to be upwardly mobile.

Another form of structural violence the MCs describe is the harsh economic and political conditions that drive people to migrate. The MCs understand the plight of migrants who face criminalization in the US as a result of their poverty, and political systems that favor migrants from other countries and those with human capital. Pok 37 and MC Crimen, for example, acknowledge how migrating to the United States is one of the few solutions open to the people of Juárez to escape poverty and unemployment:

*Que no te duele que la gente migre en este vil infierno y se le haga costumbre
dejar su casa / porque quema la lumbre dejar su patria, porque se muere de
hambre. / Su mirar es gris vivir sin vivir humildemente.*

Pok 37 and MC Crimen passionately describe the pain associated with leaving behind loved ones to search for economic survival, and are critical of how as a society we allow these conditions to continue, and thus we should not be surprised.

Criminalization and Violence

Criminalization can be a life and death issue when young men are profiled by law enforcers for simply hanging out with their friends or going to work (Rios, 2001). *Segundo Patio* by Jota Eme Ka is a song written by a member of *Sonido Grillo*, a hip hop group in Juárez. Jota Eme Ka's lyrics describe his experiences of living in poor Juárez neighborhoods and the verbal and physical abuse he and others experience from the police for simply looking like gang members or *cholos*. Aware of the power differentials that exist between the police and poor youth, the MCs' lyrics passionately describe how the poor youths' lack of power makes them easy targets:

*Gobierno policía que reprime día con día quitándote la alegría / Te lo dijo.
Lo he sentido. Por qué quitar un joing y no 100 kilos. / Será porque es más fácil
quitarle a los jodidos reprimidos.*

In these lyrics, the MC reflects on how police officers and the government abuse their power and blame the poor for the city's crime and drug problems. Jota Eme Ka, for instance, points to the irony and injustice of criminalizing



the use of marijuana, while the trafficking of hundreds of kilos of the same drug goes largely unpunished. He is critical of the power that drug traffickers have in the city and of the legal system that prioritizes the criminalization of poor young men.

Feminist MCs also discuss victimization. Activists *Batallones Femeninos* describe how young women are kidnapped, raped and killed on the way to work. Indeed, Juárez is internationally notorious as the city of murdered women. In the lyrics below, *Batallones Femeninos* describe how violence against young women is structural since it is associated with the urban sprawl exacerbated by the *maquiladoras* and the lack of security provided for female workers who often have to walk home after a long working day:

Voy de regreso a casa y es como medio día. Noto que me miran, mas no me imaginaba / que el miedo me atraparía. Cuando sola caminaba sentí que alguien se acercaba / y aceleré mi paso. Cuando jalaron mi mano grité lo más que pude. Todos se volvieron sordos.

Nadie dijo nada. Nadie miró nada. Violada, torturada, amenazada, amordazada, / con lágrimas imploraba que esto terminara. «Ayúdame» gritaba, pero lejos estaba y ya no regresé a casa.

As well as class consciousness, feminist awareness is embedded in *Batallones Femeninos*' lyrics. *Asi Era Ella* gives a voice to the young women who disappeared and draws a parallel between their situations and slave labor and dangerous living conditions. Towards the end of the song these female MCs sing about the suffering of the victims and their family members.

María, Petra, Carolina, 13, 18, 16. Los pechos mordidos, las manos atadas, calcinados sus cuerpos, sus huesos pulidos por la arena del desierto. Se llaman las muertas que nadie sabe, que nadie vio que mataran.

Mi madre preocupada y alterada me buscaba 48 horas, «espere la señora» le decían.

Yo desaparecida, ella desesperada, se aferraba a mi fotografía, pegada en las esquinas.

These female MCs describe the pain families feel especially in the first 48 hours following a young woman's disappearance, and the structural violence



in the way the government allows these murders to continue by not providing the resources to solve them.

In sum, hip hop is a powerful medium for denouncing structural violence. The four songs presented above illustrate how hip hop represents a form of deviant politics. Despite the lack of formal education, MCs incorporate their street knowledge and critical consciousness into their hip hop lyrics. In the section below, the perspectives highlighted in the content analysis are reinforced through in-depth interviews with the MCs.

Developments in Hip Hop throughout the Years

Based on data from interviews with the 16 MCs, this section describes how hip hop and its association with violence and criminalization have changed since the 1990s in Juárez. Coyote is the oldest MC interviewed; he remembers his life in poor neighborhoods and the lack of educational opportunities. In this context, hip hop became a way to re-empower himself and thus his way of life. During the 1990s, however, the hip hop scene was bound up with gang activity:

En el sarahuat, entrabas y tenías que traer el fierro en la mano. Éramos chavillos cholos, teníamos que ponernos un pantalón aguado con una camisa de vestir, pero siempre traíamos los zapatos de punta de fierro, como nos esculcaban mucho pues no podíamos meter un filero. Entonces nos poníamos los zapatos de construcción, pues es un arma. Entonces ya después traíamos los pantalones más aguados pero con una camisa más de vestir como las caramelo.

Even when they were not in gangs, MCs were stereotyped as gang members. Coyote described how the way they dressed could identify rappers as *cholos* and made them susceptible to violence.

Coyote explained that members of other gangs were not the only problems he had to deal with at that time; the police constantly targeted him and his friends because of their appearance.

Te miraban tumbado con un diki te paraban a wuevo, ya sabían que andabas mari guano ya sabían que traías un filero. Una garra o que acababas de enjaularte, pero cuando yo me vestía como rapero de todos modos me paraban, es que ya no había cholos, de hecho anoche me pararon por eso.



Indeed, on the day of our interview Coyote had been stopped and questioned by the police for no apparent reason, although he suspects it was because of the way he looks. He feels this police profiling is part of his life and it has created mistrust of law enforcement officials.

Today, the context is not as violent for hip hop artists although they continue to face criminalization at the hands of law enforcers. In the quote below Tuga reflects on how police officers have consistently targeted him since he was young. In part because he dresses like a *cholo*, police officers frequently stop him to check for guns and drugs. The police also abuse their power and request money in exchange for keeping him out of jail even when he has done nothing wrong:

Tú sales afuera y te dicen [la policía] a ver mi chavo por qué tan guango, a ver cáigase. Yo si creo que en Juárez ya no hay respeto, yo tengo que respetar al cristiano que tiene una doble moral, por ejemplo con los títeres, traía la canción de moviendo su culito y pues busque la canción editada y después paso a una tienda y una canción a todo lo que da de rompiendo cabezas y cuando se acaba estaba en la zeta, así que hay una doble moral.

Tuga works in the streets of Juárez with his puppet show. Every once in a while he has to bribe police officers to avoid arrest. Another contradiction Tuga notes is his frustration because he is criminalized as a hip hop artist, yet songs that over-sexualize women or glamorize drug dealers seem to be more accepted by society. For instance, *narco-corridos* explicitly describes killing people, which makes the MC wonder why hip hop is targeted when they are trying to raise social consciousness.

Diomer remembers high levels of violence and frequent shootings in his neighborhood. Since the 90s the content of hip hop lyrics has changed: in the 90s, Diomer explained that hip hop was stigmatized as music for *marijuanos*, but nowadays, MCs include a more positive message in their lyrics:

Y pues hasta la fecha casi todas nuestras rolas llevan un mensaje. Pero mucha gente dice: ay no, música de mariguanos de violencia y por la violencia, pero como te digo hay para todas mis audiencias a pesar que la gente de aquí somos estrictos, tengo audiencia de todo.

These testimonies illustrate the transformation hip hop has undergone since the 1990s in Juárez. However, throughout these years both young and



more mature MCs report similar experiences of stigmatization, criminalization, and limited social opportunities.

Deviant Politics of Resistance: How Hip Hop is used as a Form of Resistance

The previous section discussed how MCs' youth and poverty interlock, shaping their lack of opportunities, criminalization, and exposure to violence. In this section I draw on Rios' (2011) concept of deviant politics to describe how people resist oppression with deviant acts, such as activism and exposing others to oppositional consciousness. I argue that deviant politics arises in hip hop in several ways: as activism, in music lyrics, as oppositional consciousness, or by resisting formal employment.

Activism as Deviant Politics

Mac is one of several MCs whose deviant politics involve activism against the femicides. As a muralist almost all his work addresses the femicides and more recently, the Ayotzinapa case. He did not attend middle school. He comes from a poor family and he lost his mother at a very young age. His oppositional consciousness developed during a trip to southern Mexico where he witnessed inequalities brought about by capitalism. When he returned to Juárez his deviant politics surfaced as activism. In the following quote, Mac describes how he wrote a song to protest the missing girls from Juárez:

Ejemplo, unas que hicieron ahí con las jefas, no? Nacieron unas rimas así bien locas caminando, tratando y escribiendo. Entonces ahora se las pongo así y la han escuchado y me han dicho así como que: ay no manches, me recuerda la caminata, no? Y pos sí, o sea, ahí los que íbamos en esa ocasión hay uno que se dio ahí y sí la escuchan y dicen no mames ésa es la caminata wei. Y pues de ahí nacieron y pero ahí va la cosa esta chidota, esta chidata, me gusta.

Mac wrote the lyric in collaboration with *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*. He is particularly proud of this song and encouraged another MC to write his own protest song.

Hip hop has become an important component of this social movement, which at least offers the refuge and peace that comes from participating.



Musical Lyrics

Previously, I highlighted results from the content analysis of the critical consciousness embedded in MC lyrics; in this section I explore the idea of hip hop lyrics as forms of deviant politics. Some examples are *Ratas con Corbata* in which Adrian and Axel sing about corruption in the Mexican government and how it has sold out its citizens in exchange for profits. The lyrics express citizens' frustration with high taxes and the abuse of power by, among others, government officials and *narcotraficantes* (drug traffickers).

*Quieren mis impuestos y mi plata. Van por mi dinero y su poder lo arrebató.
/ Ratatata si no se quiere, se mata. Quieren mis impuestos y mi plata*

Ratas con Corbata criticizes the relationship between the government and the *narcotraficantes*, and demonstrates the MCs' oppositional consciousness. Similarly, in the lyrics below MCs Adrian and Axel describe how the Mexican government is just a puppet of the *narcotraficantes*:

De la mafia marionetas son nuestros gobernantes. Gritenle «basura». Ya nada es como antes / nos tienen presos en el Internet a diario y comprar una casa es como un robo voluntario.

These MCs blame not only the government for the oppressive conditions, but also the passivity of Mexican citizens vis-à-vis the situation.

Oppositional Consciousness

Today, some of these MCs are still forming crews with ex-gang or non-gang members. They are trying to create positive spaces between the different crews instead of fighting against each other. Some of them are working to prevent young people from using or selling drugs. One of these groups is called *Alto a la Violencia*; they run graffiti and hip hop workshops for young people in an effort to keep them away from drugs.

Mi música más que nada, cambiar la mentalidad de los jóvenes de mi edad, pero en el aspecto de las drogas, de matarse, que piensen diferente. Porque yo al igual anduve igual que ellos. Como le digo con un colega el ukla, éramos de un barrio de acá, pues había rencillas en su barrio y el mío y los 2 formamos parte de ese barrio y a través del hip hop, en vez de hacer más violencia la contrarrestamos y ahorita somos amigos, de hecho si pos casi hermanos.



Pok 37 and MC Crimen are ex-gang members, who after surviving the drug war, organize young people in poor neighborhoods and help them develop different forms of expression, including hip hop, which is now an alternative to violent behavior and drug use. Through graffiti and music workshops these two MCs act as mentors for the young people, particularly the boys.

Diomer from Funky Bless is another hip hop MC working with juveniles in the criminal justice system. He performs in correctional facilities using lyrics to teach the youths about positive alternatives to gangs or using drugs:

Si se pueden presentar en cualquier lado?

Hemos estado en el tribunal, nos llevaron a dar un concierto y les contamos vivencias, me cae que a algunos chavos les entramos en la chompa, igual empezamos a dar concejos y termina en vivencias. Mi rap no es así que insiste a la violencia, habla cosas buenas, puro positivismo y pues depende de la gente. Pero al igual no me meto a tirarle al gobierno, más que activista soy un difusor.

Diomer promotes hip hop culture without violence; he wants to be a positive role model for these young men.

Resisting Formal Employment as a Form of Deviant Politics

Another form of deviant politics is through denouncing exploitation in formal employment. Neto and Quide are part of the group *Hit Fever* and are the youngest hip hop MCs in this study. They are highly aware of the stigmatization and discrimination of people who are or look like *cholos*. Like other MCs, they sing in *rutas* for money rather than taking long strenuous *maquiladora* jobs:

Por ejemplo, tenemos una canción que se llama detrás de lo que piensas, que habla de que nos ven malichas y andamos tumbados, ando robando e incluso la policía se va con la finta de que uno anda haciendo fechorías. Y simplemente uno se dedica a cantar rap y la vestimenta es porque representa. También enseñar la cultura para que no se vayan con la finta. Es como dicen por ahí, un doctor no puede entrar a operar vestido de civil, tiene que traer su bata, y uno hasta consiente de las críticas de la sociedad que piensa que uno es delincuente, maliya, que anda haciendo tonterías, pero detrás de esa canción explica eso.



These MCs won 1,500 pesos in a government-sponsored competition for musicians, so they are hopeful about their future prospects in this industry. However, they do not expect to shed the deviant labels society has imposed on them.

Conclusion

Hip hop groups have been active for many years in Juárez despite having to combat the stigma that citizens and police place on them; for many decades, the *cholos* of Juárez and El Paso have listened to this style of music that was often part of belonging to gangs or crews. These gangs were stigmatized in this way because they were associated with stealing, drug trafficking, street fights, and many other activities that have been increasingly criminalized. This study illustrates how, since the beginning of the 90s, MCs relate how police officers and society has targeted them as criminals. By contrast, today's MCs claim they are still targeted, but they are more hopeful about the future.

After the drug war, hip hop groups became a form of deviant politics expressing an oppositional consciousness about life on the Juárez-El Paso border. As survivors of the drug war (Campbell, 2010) MCs along the border are now looking to change their environment in pursuit of a better life. For them, the *barrios* or gangs are no more because all the old timers are either dead or had to run away from Juárez. This gives the MCs an opportunity to re-invent themselves and in this process hip hop has become a form of consciousness raising. Through public performances, they are creating social awareness among the people of Juárez, which in turn may trigger social movements. The exclusion from legitimate opportunities in society and the violence in the MCs' environment has fueled their social consciousness. In this study, we see how violence is normalized in poor neighborhoods from an early age; however, all the interviewees expressed shock at the high murder rates in 2008. Coping and surviving in such a social environment was very difficult, and the youth had to sharpen up in what Anderson (1999) calls the "code of the street". The code of the street for these youths is very important because MCs can be discredited if they are not tough enough to survive there.



Following Rios (2011), the abuse of power, hyper-criminality, and lack of opportunities create resilience displayed through hip hop. Hip hop is then a form of deviant politics, which leads to further criminalization for being a part of the hip hop culture via stigmas associated with the way they dress (i.e., looking like *cholos*) and performing in public spaces, in addition to their status as poor, young, and male. The songs are the tools for the youth to speak out about the inequalities that the government system perpetrates among young people in poor neighborhoods.

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