

## Chronicling the New Transnational Migrant Experience: An Interview with Daniel Hernandez

By Monica Hanna

Daniel Hernandez (San Diego, 1980) is part of a group of contemporary Latin@ chroniclers reshaping how we understand culture in the American hemispheric borderlands via a nonfiction literary oeuvre that rethinks how US Latin@s engage with Latin American realities.<sup>1</sup> Hernandez's writing confronts the national and cultural categories that no longer hold in an increasingly transnationalized and culturally hybrid world. His literary journalism—which incorporates chronicle, memoir, and ethnography—provides first-hand testimony of a “post-Chicano from the borderlands” who is equally at home in Mexico City as in San Diego or Tijuana or Tokyo. His writing is layered and lyrical, delivering journalistic insights with great literary flair like some of the best Latin American *cronistas* and US New Journalists who have influenced him.

In his 2011 book, *Down and Delirious in Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century*,<sup>2</sup> Hernandez explores his experiences as a self-described “pocho” living in Mexico City while writing for various newspapers and magazines for the last decade. Classifying himself as “a bilingual bicultural binational journalist” on his blog *Intersections*, Hernandez has written for *The Los Angeles Times*, *The LA Weekly*, and *Gatopardo*, and is currently an editor at *Vice Mexico*. In *Down and Delirious*, he investigates various elements of the city, from political issues to in-depth analyses of youth subcultures. The book contains chronicles of “urban tribes” of fashionistas and *pochos*, punks and emos, *cholos* and *fresas*, all of whose paths converge on the cosmopolitan and sometimes chaotic mega-metropolis of the Mexican capital. This geographical position allows Hernandez the distance necessary to consider what Chican@ identity might look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century given the realities of new migration patterns and the increasing cultural permeability of borders. The sophistication of his cultural analysis puts him in line with writers on subculture like Dick Hebdige, and shows the influence of border theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa. Shuttling between insider and outsider perspectives on cultural and political questions, Hernandez’s work is remarkable not just for its problematizing of notions of national and cultural identities, but also for its reflections on the nature of contemporary journalism.

Hernandez’s work draws on various genres, including Latin American *crónica*.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary *crónicas* are marked by their use of literary techniques in journalistic writing, providing historical and narrative depth to the events described rather than reporting “just the facts.” It is a hybrid genre<sup>4</sup> in which the journalist is often an integral part of the story, not just a presumed objective outsider. The *crónica* has a long Hispanophone tradition in the Americas, starting with the “*crónicas de Indias*” written by Spaniards during the colonial period, including such varied works as Bartolomé de las Casas’ *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552) and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1632). These chroniclers wrote about their experiences in the Americas for the Spanish public, reporting back to the seat of empire to inform but also to shape opinions and policies. A later iteration of this tradition, the *crónica modernista*, also related American hemispheric realities,

but from natives of the Americas, such as José Martí, Rubén Darío, and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. Martí, the Cuban patriot, like Hernandez was also a traveler through the Americas, though he spent several productive years in a different major American metropolis: New York. There are plenty of other examples of contemporary *cronistas* in Latin America, including Boom writers like García Márquez who of course founded the organization which bears his name, FNPI, the Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano, and has often discussed his fascination about the connection between journalism and literary production. This is also a foundation that provides a “guide to avant guard journalism in ‘Iberoamerica’” and a list of “Chronicle Writers and Movers-and-Shakers” which includes only two U.S. citizens who write primarily in English, one of whom is Daniel Hernandez.<sup>5</sup>

Hernandez’s writing pulls from not only the Hispanophone American tradition but also his U.S. training as a journalist. Among his journalistic influences, Hernandez cites New Journalists Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson; the Italian writer Oriana Fallaci; the U.S. historian and writer Mike Davis; U.S. Latino writers and journalists Francisco Goldman, Daniel Alarcón, and Rubén Martínez; and Mexican journalists Alma Guillermoprieto, Diego Enrique Osorno, Laura Castellanos, and Sanjuana Martínez. This transnational list of influences contextualizes Hernandez’s work within both a journalistic tradition taking hold in the 1960s and 70s as well as a current boom in production by young *cronistas* across the borders of the Americas with the strong participation of U.S. Latino/a writers.

Daniel Hernandez spoke with me in February 2013 by phone from his home in Mexico City, fresh off writing a story about the recent Pemex<sup>6</sup> explosion that had killed 37 workers. We discussed topics including his writing style, methods, and reception, along with his evolving relationship to Mexico City and to the two nations of which he is a citizen (the United States and Mexico).

**MH:** One of the things that I find fascinating about [your book *Down and Delirious in Mexico City*] is your mix of genres. Maybe we can start by talking about how you came to the structure that you used.

**DH:** The book [...] is a mix of reportage and *crónica*. I also think that it has elements of ethnography as well as memoir and essay. I like to say that it's a collection of non-fiction that charts my assimilation to Mexico as a Mexican American. My operating rule when I write about a personal subject is that I'm trying to write as I would to an intimate friend. But since my training and my DNA are those of a reporter, I also write about a place or a person or myself as a reporter would. So I do try to put all of those genres into the mix, and write it out and try to approach a fair-as-possible vision of the truth as I saw it.

**MH:** You say that your training in journalism in the U.S. is part of your DNA. I wonder if that has changed over your years in Mexico. Has that rewritten your DNA in terms of your approach to reporting?

**DH:** What has changed is the way that I relate to Mexico. That inevitably influences how I report on it. When I first moved here, in 2002, Mexico was a completely foreign and alien place to me. There were elements of familiarity, *claro*—my parents are Mexican and I consider myself Mexican always—but Mexico City was this place that I had no connection to whatsoever. But I

was fascinated by it. In those initial times, I was trying to write and report a bit; I had just graduated from college in 2002. I think part of my desire to know Mexico in the fullest possible way was rooted because it's such a newsy place. It's such a great story. It's such a rich and complex and contradictory place with so much goodness and so much promise and so much light and then so much evil and so much tragedy and so much darkness. All of those contradictions and all of those characteristics about the culture, the history, the society, the way it works, are what compel me to report. I want to find out what this is all about, whether that is an uptick in violence in Acapulco or whether that is the discovery of a new archaeological site in Oaxaca. It's just such an incredibly newsy place. "Newsy" is a colloquial term used in newsrooms to describe a great story. I've always found myself unable to turn away from the wonderful daily drama that is Mexico, and in particular Mexico City.

I do feel that it's changed in the sense that I'm a little more seasoned now and I know where to turn. I know how to get closer to the facts and to the truth. I also find myself learning every day, like don't give out your home phone to a police source. You also have to learn to defend yourself, because it is a somewhat hostile place to practice journalism.

**MH:** I like that you call Mexico a newsy place, and a place that you found to be so rich and full of elements of culture and contradictions. I wonder what you think about what we in the United States learn about Mexico through the news. You talk so much about culture, and most of what we get seems to be about drug trafficking. How do you place your work in relation to other U.S. reporting on Mexico? Do you see your reporting as a type of corrective to what we normally get?

**DH:** It is true that the vision of the United States is warped about Mexico, because of the proximity to the United States, and the kinds of historical and contemporary interests that the United States has in Mexico as well as the huge diaspora of Mexicans in the United States. I do think it is important to inform people as much as possible about the nature of drug trafficking and the drug war and violence in Mexico because we love Mexico—I love Mexico and I know that millions of people in the United States love Mexico—and it's very painful and saddening to bear witness to the awful, terrible crimes that are happening in the country, and awful ways that people are victimized and their lives are bended because of the lack of justice and the lack of security. So I do see it as necessary and part of my duty to keep people informed about what is happening in the country, because we want authorities in both countries to be responsible and to do their jobs and protect people and prevent the horrors that are happening. Unfortunately, no one is doing that.

So I see my work playing on a bunch of different levels. As an author, as a cultural journalist, as a writer of creative nonfiction, my book is my love letter, my homage, my gift to Mexico City. People tell me that the book touched them because they see themselves reflected in some of the experiences that I share in the book. With the book translated into Spanish, it also has had a whole different kind of effect. The other level of my work is as a straight-up news writer—that's how I pay my rent and my bills—and I have to write about that stuff.

But I think I do make every effort to complicate the narrative. By that I mean it is important for me to do a story that reflects a reality of life here. That may not have to do directly with drug-related violence or with injustice or with politics, but with something about the way the country works and the culture ticks—what makes people tick, what makes people sit up, what makes

people listen, what makes people sad, or what makes people happy. And also, all of the historical meat that you can rake out in a story. And I try to avoid clichés when I do that. I don't feel the need anymore to cite Bernal Díaz or Octavio Paz about Mexico City. To me, it's a very modern, contemporary place. My vision, my allegory for Mexico, my cosmic analogy is Tokyo, because it's second or third in population size and Tokyo also has this hypermodern, anime kind of vibe to it. There's this distance. When you're here, you feel like, "Whoa, what am I?" And it has this kind of alienating effect at well.

[...] Sometimes people will ask me not to write so negatively about Mexico. Man, I live here. It sucks. It's something that has happened, it's affecting people, and it's compelling me to write about it.

**MH:** I wonder if those critiques that you're getting have less to do with your writing so much as your subject position—that you have two nationalities, that you were born and grew up in the US.

**DH:** Yes. Because I feel so assimilated, I tend to forget that the historical record here is that journalists writing in English on Mexico [often have been] adventurous old white men. That is a tradition that major newspapers in the United States and the English-speaking world really hold on tight to. It's this unspoken, weird tradition that I as a dual subject complicate. People, especially older white men who have been to Mexico and think that they really know Mexico, sometimes will be the harshest critics of what I say.

**MH:** You're not authentic enough for them?

**DH:** Exactly. I think it's this intimidation or unease with the power of perspective that I can bring. It freaks people out sometimes because I grew up with this shit partly. We used to go to Tijuana. We knew who the PRI was. We knew that things were messed up. We knew that there wasn't water and the streets weren't paved. If you got sick, well, that was it. And a public doctor could accidentally kill you. I just know the heartbreak that exists in Mexico. But I also partly left in exile from the United States. I was born in the United States. I was educated in the United States. I don't know all the words to the Mexican national anthem like the "Star Spangled Banner." That isn't going to change. And that is something that I hold very close because it permits me to be a conduit between two different narratives. And that is the case. I knew when I was writing *Down and Delirious* that the book would be scrutinized up and down because everyone else who had written in English about Mexico before this in a really concentrated form—except for maybe Rubén Martínez in *Crossing Over*, the only book about Mexico by a Mexican American—[were] traditional expats. And so I tried in the process of writing the book to be faithful to who I was, but also aware of this tradition, and not be hostile to it, not antagonize it. My book is part of that, but different in a special way.

**MH:** Can you talk about the reception of the Spanish-language translation?

**DH:** The Mexicans reading the book and the *mexicanos* reading the book in the Spanish translation is totally freer. They love it.

**MH:** It's so interesting that the criticism would be coming from the American side.

**DH:** Right. I think the book was really embraced from the get-go by people here. The sentiment that I got from a lot of people was even gratitude for having shared these experiences and these perspectives as a *pochó*. This was like a culture that they were aware of but a lot of times unable to access, because a lot of times when a migrant goes north, *ya se acabó*, the story ends there: they went north. The historical precedent here is ignoring the migrant. People are increasingly becoming aware of that and trying to rectify that, especially younger generations of intellectuals and academics and historians and journalists. Past generations of Mexican governments and the Mexican intellectual elite and the Mexican cultural elite have completely been unable to access any kind of contact with the north or are indifferent. I guess a lot of people felt that it was a breath of fresh air that I as a *pochó* exile could come to Mexico and have these experiences and share them with others. That's been really cool. The truth is that every *mexicano* these days has some connection to the United States, if not a direct connection. That is something that is more and more evident and is going to keep being a defining feature of life for the two cultures.

**MH:** I also wonder if the sense that once someone goes north that's it, whether that is changing too. Especially now that people are more and more mobile. I wonder if the politicians are cluing into these migrations that go back and forth, not just one way and then cut off forever. For example, Mexicans who are living abroad can vote now.

**DH:** Yes, that is true. That is also something that is changing, and I think that we—journalists and anyone who historicizes this—are running behind. The transnational migrant now is becoming more common, or more visible than the downtrodden refugee migrant. The migrants who go to the United States, find success, find capital, and bring it back themselves—physically, bodily—to Mexico. And when they come back, they find that they are not only contributing in some form to the country economically, but they're bringing mannerisms, idioms, culture. The slightest, almost intangible, aspects of the United States, the Anglo capitalist system, and all of what that entails, little by little those characteristics start filtering here. One of the things that I see is more of a heartened demand for accountability. Mexicans are used to corruption, and authorities abusing their powers and their offices, while in the United States there is zero tolerance. In the United States there's even unawareness that a police officer could be corrupt. We know that there are many police and government officials who are corrupt, but it still shocks people. And in Mexico it's shocking when someone isn't corrupt. But when you go to the United States, and a *mexicano* learns that you can trust a police officer when you're having an emergency, and you bring that back to Mexico, where the opposite is true, well, I think, and I hope that more of this happens, is that people demand more of the aspects of gringo culture that we could use in Mexico.

The same is true when you see how the United States is Mexicanizing. I am always surprised when I see the sophistication that people are acquiring about Mexico among those who want to learn and want more contact with Mexico. The key to that swinging door is food of course. Whereas five years ago people might know tacos and tortas in the United States, now everyone knows tacos, tortas, tlacoyos, quesadillas, pambazos...they know everything. All of these things that I had to come here to learn ten years ago, now people have access to in the United States, and that's amazing.

**MH:** I'm always surprised when I teach my intro Chicano Studies class, I have students who are not Chicanos but are different races and are curious and want to learn.

**DH:** That was one of the big reasons why I decided to come here after university, because I was meeting all of these American kids who knew more about Mexico than I did. I thought that didn't seem right. I thought that if I wanted to be a good citizen of both places, that I should know my stuff. But yeah, I think it's great that a lot of Anglo Americans have a genuine love, curiosity, and affection, and build genuine relationships with Mexico. That is never going to change, and that's part of Mexico's beauty: it's so welcoming to every nation and to every kind of person, at least the people are, if not the institutions. And that's something that will keep going. I hope that's part of the appeal of the book, that these non-Mexican Americans can access some of these feelings too, about going to a new place and discovering some of these challenging things, and being challenged by a different place.

**MH:** One of the things I like so much about the book is precisely the way that you problematize so many of our ideas and complicate not just outsider views of Mexico, but also Mexican American views of the country. One of my favorite parts was when you go to the sweat lodge and you get to a point when you say that you can't recapture a sense of authenticity of the past, but are much more interested in an ethnography of the now and curious about what tribes are doing now.<sup>7</sup>

**DH:** That was a step into the void for me because I thought the hard-core Chicanistas were going to be pissed at me for this, because I wasn't as reverential or as open as I should have been.

**MH:** But you just had a different experience and a different set of interests and maybe you trace your own Chicano identity in a different way.

**DH:** Exactly. My hope, for that chapter in particular, was that other Mexican American kids who down the road or in the past have come to Mexico and not connected directly in the way that they thought that they should, that they could pull out hope and freshness from that chapter in particular.

**MH:** I notice a shift over the course of the chapters, and especially the postscript, a shift from being an outsider to an insider, from excitement and enthusiasm to an element of critique. I notice, for example, that you critique quite a bit the classism that was maybe more rooted than you expected. And in the postscript you end with a discussion of the possibility of moving from Mexico City to another world city. Can you talk about the shifts that have happened in your relation to Mexico? The postscript is a couple of years old now. Are you still thinking that there is another place for you?<sup>8</sup>

**DH:** I have always had, and I think a lot of people do, this sense of searching, an urgency and desire to keep looking, and to keep exploring one's own boundaries and one's own territories, and challenging comfort zones. I might not have been, in the past two years since the book has come out, as faithful to the note as I wrote. I basically have stayed put. I go more frequently now to the United States and to Southern California. For me, that is a way that I can at least partially

access the new transnational migrant experience. When I talk to people, I tell them that I live here, but I go three times a year, or three months out of the year, to see my parents in *Estados Unidos*. People instantly know all of the implications there, *mexicanos* on both sides of the border will. But ten years ago, people over there would say, “Are you crazy? Why are you going to the DF?” and people down here would say, “Are you crazy? Why did you move here? Why did you leave the U.S.?” But that has completely changed. My frontier now is being a back-and-forth person. That’s challenging for my family, for my relationship here, that’s challenging for my sense of roots. I’m building a root now in Mexico, and where I have a root in the United States now, I haven’t really been cultivating it. It’s been kind of this standby place where I’m from, but sometimes I feel like I’m losing references and that freaks me out. Sometimes I feel like it’s time to go back to the United States, or it is necessary for me to check in deeper with the U.S. And there are aspects about the U.S. that I missed a lot. I missed all kinds of things.

**MH:** Is all of your family here?

**DH:** Yes. There and in Tijuana and Ensenada. My dad left TJ and worked in the fields in San Joaquin Valley starting in the late 60s. All my uncles too. For the most part, we’re all there, right on the border.

**MH:** Another thing you say in the book is that the only place that makes sense for you as a home is in a border space, between two different places. In a way, that’s also a metaphor for you as a journalist, right? You can never be totally part of what you’re reporting. You are and you aren’t.

**DH:** Yes. The border is where it’s at.

For instance, when I’m reporting on a group or a subculture, for myself and for my practice I must find a connection. And if I don’t have that, consciously or subconsciously, I lose interest because it’s pointless for me to write about a group that I have zero connection with. I’m not going to go to Arizona and try to interview the Minutemen. I admire people who do, but it’s just not in me. So that kind of stuff is what feeds my writing. If I’m going to a reggaeton club and figure out the reggaeton scene here, I’m going to go and dance and have some drinks and have fun.

**MH:** That comes across in the writing, that you always have respect for your subjects.

**DH:** Yes, and that’s a huge challenge. Chapter 5 charts a moment when I am covering the emos and I worry that maybe I’m reading these kids wrong.<sup>9</sup> When I was trying to touch base with the emos, I was going with the pack of a lot of other reporters initially, and kind of making fun of emos. And when I realized that I was falling into the same trap as everyone else, I had to give myself the leeway to realize that I could be wrong here.

**MH:** That recognition is a lot like that profound sentence in “Kidnapped” in which you wonder whether you’ve been kidnapped by the story.<sup>10</sup> You have this self-reflexive moment in which you’re thinking about your role as a journalist in helping to create the story, not just to report it as we normally think of journalists. We normally think of journalists as robots, as totally removed from the story, but of course that is not how it works and that is never how it works.

**DH:** That's never how it works. The disinterested prism that we're taught we have to write a story through is a mirage. One of the things that fueled the writing of the book was the weight lifted off my shoulders and feeling I could finally say not only what the story is, but also what are my complications with it.

**MH:** Yes, and isn't that more honest than the straight-faced pose of subjectivity? Isn't it much more honest just to say what it is that's complicating your vision?

**DH:** I think it is. But...on my Twitter I will say things on my Twitter that I know the eighteenth person up the ladder of my bosses in Los Angeles is looking at them and thinking that I can never be a full journalist because I just said fuck the pope or something. But that's how I gain trust with my readers. My commitment is to my readers. And the only way that I can gain their trust is if I am as straight-up as possible about my vision of the facts, and give them the facts as much as possible.

**MH:** Do you think that the atmosphere is shifting? Now there are so many blogs, you have a blog too, and that's a format in which you're not expected to be as "factual." You're expected to be more opinionated. Do you think that's seeping into the more traditional journalistic venues?

**DH:** That may. I do see it in terms of the polarization of the media; now there's left media and right media. I don't know if I'm really as concerned with that. Sometimes it's almost as if it's a pose with some people to be opinionated or polarizing.

**MH:** It's also a way to get ratings.

**DH:** Uh-huh, a way to get ratings, or a way to attract attention, or a way to get clicks. And it doesn't do anything for me. I lose interest really fast. I can't pay attention to any of that. But what I do pay attention to is a well-reported, well backed-up opinion. You have to back it up and check yourself. You have to be your best editor and your most vigilant, hostile editor. I can't quite pinpoint it, but I know it when I see it.

**MH:** Back to your writing practice—do you ever write in Spanish directly?

**DH:** I do write in Spanish directly, but I'm still working on it. For example, right now they're asking me to write something in Spanish on Pemex.<sup>11</sup> I'm writing it in English and I'll throw in a phrase in Spanish...I don't know. That's a really, really malleable area for me right now, because I've found it difficult to ease into... I can talk in Spanish, I can read in Spanish, I can communicate in Spanish, I *can* write in Spanish, but my writing voice goes back to English. But sometimes my writing voice will get kind of infected with Spanish diction, so certain things I will write in English thinking about how it's going to sound in Spanish.

[...] It hasn't gotten to the point where I will go to the U.S. and forget something in English, but it has happened that I will have a word or phrase that is perfect for something in English but I can't access it in Spanish, or I'll have a huge long cumbersome phrase in English and I wish I could just say *chinga* or something in Spanish. Sometimes I find English very cumbersome and inflexible and the beauty of Mexican Spanish is that it has so many different ways to say so

many different things and that gives a richness to what you're communicating, whether it's a negative or positive expression.

**MH:** One last question—you spend a lot of time in the book investigating subcultures and alternative forms of community. You talk a bit about some of your friendships, but I was wondering if you could say more about how you make or find community in Mexico City. What's your tribe, so to speak?

**DH:** I really try to manage myself in a bunch of communities. In the book when I describe moments when I'm hanging out with punk kids or goth kids or hip hop kids or taggers or fashion kids, I'm really hanging out with them. They want to hang out with me. The kids I'm hanging out with are my community in that moment. That's something that I might have picked up in L.A.: feeling comfortable wherever you're at, finding a point where you say, "You know what? I'm here in this moment right now, and this is where I'm at, so therefore this is where I'll feel comfortable. This is where I shall access a community, and this is where I shall feel comfortable expressing myself. And if that makes anyone else uncomfortable, then I'm out."

Here in DF, I do hang out with Californians and with *gringos* and with *güeros*. I'm finding now at 32 that a lot of my friends are 26 and 27. I feel good around young people because young people are the incubators of what's next. That always draws me, and as long as that impulse remains genuine in me I'll keep doing that. I hang out in the queer community. I consider myself queer, I merge different sexualities, and I find access to different sexual identities not because it's my own sexual identity or sexual practice, but because I recognize how identity is constructed and I *love* the different ways that people construct their identity, whether that's through sexual orientation or through the sex act. To me it's all one and the same, and it's all awesome and incredible.

I just feel like the way that I move in the city is as challenging and as frustrating to kind of traditional roles and narratives that so many other people do.

[...] I build my communities a lot around music. I feel very connected to the electronic music culture right now. It goes in waves, in crests and shallows. I'll go through a strong cumbia sonidera phase, and I'll only hang out with cumbia sonidera kids. At other times, I'll go through a hip hop phase and I'll feel really isolated here because I'll only be consuming American hip hop. That's something that I grew up with and that I'll never lose.

The communities that I build here or that I belong to here don't always intersect, and sometimes they're even unaware of each other. I don't know how many of my readers, or of the people I hang out with who are Mexican Americans visiting DF, know about my other cultures and my other identities. But I don't care. That's where I am now. I'm really close to goth right now. I dress in Nikes and flat caps but it might go into goth. How does that work? I hardly ever use the word gay. I don't feel access to gay with a capital G, but I feel access to the weirdness that is gay, and the weirdness of queer. My role in these different communities is...the bridge is you, and you are the bridge. That's the only way that I can move. At the end of the day, people here respect you when you are being your honest you. And my honest me is hip hop-wearing, cumbia-

dancing, non-visually apparent queer person who feels like a goth. (Laughs) I don't know what that means, but that's the way it is.

<sup>1</sup> There has been a boom of U.S. Latin@ writers producing chronicles about Latin America, and especially its relationship to the U.S., since the 1990s. Important writers in this category include writers who work primarily as journalists, like Rubén Martínez and Sonia Nazario, but also other writers who move back and forth between fiction (novels and short stories) and chronicles, such as Daniel Alarcón, Francisco Goldman, Hector Tobar, and Luis Alberto Urrea (Goldman and Alarcón, not coincidentally, wrote blurbs for the back cover of the paperback edition of *Down and Delirious*).

<sup>2</sup> In the same year of the book's publication in English, it was translated by Elizabeth Flores and published in Spanish by Oceano as *El bajón y el delirio: Crónicas de un pocho en la Ciudad de México*, which translates literally as "Funk and Delirium: The Chronicles of a Pocho in Mexico City."

<sup>3</sup> *Crónica* translates into English as "chronicle" and refers to journalistic work that includes literary elements. For more on the *crónica* tradition in Latin America, including definitions and a historical overview, see Esperança Bielsa's *The Latin American Urban Crónica*. For a historical survey and analysis of Mexican *crónica*, see *cronista* Carlos Monsiváis' *A ustedes les consta*. A useful English-language resource on Mexican *crónica*, which includes translated writings by practitioners of the form as well as scholarship, is *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle*, edited by Ignacio Corona and Beth E. Jörgensen.

<sup>4</sup> Many critics note this hybridity with a variety of terms. To give two examples, scholar Esperança Bielsa has described *crónica* as "a hybrid genre from the contact zone," while *cronista* and critic Juan Villoro calls *crónica* "the platypus of prose" ("el ornitorrinco de la prosa") as a metaphor for its hybrid nature.

<sup>5</sup> The other is Daniel Alarcón, who writes both fiction and *crónica*, including one of his most recent projects, *Radio Ambulante*, a radio show and podcast which highlights stories about the experiences of ordinary people and newspapers in the the Spanish-speaking Americas (from the U.S. to the Southern Cone). See the *Nuevos Cronistas de Indias* and *Radio Ambulante* websites.

<sup>6</sup> Petróleos Mexicanos, the Mexican state-owned petroleum company.

<sup>7</sup> In a chapter titled "Attack of the Sweat Lodge," Hernandez describes his experience at a *temazcal*, or traditional sweat lodge, in a distant Mexico City suburb. At first, he says, "I am intrigued. The reclaiming of pre-Hispanic traditions is a strong phenomenon on both sides of the border (182). At this point, he sees the sweat lodge experience as a way to access the indigenous element of Mexican culture that is not just part of its history but also its present. His experience, though, feels inauthentic to him and physically stifling, causing him to exit the *temazcal* early. He explains, "The temazcal just isn't for me. I find urban indigenous practices of today more interesting than those from yesterday. Conquest bred mixture, and mixture implies leaving some ingredients out and adding in new ones, a constant cycle of evolution, a constant stirring. The Indian citizens of Mexico City have created new sets of rituals in five hundred years in the apocalyptic city" (196).

<sup>8</sup> The postscript to *Down and Delirious* concludes the book as follows: "I am at home here [in Mexico City], but I could never say I wouldn't move on. I have visions of Istanbul or Shanghai, a nameless coastal paradise, a dark nightmare in the sort of world we haven't seen yet. Sometimes I see a future back in Los Angeles or on the border. The border is the only place in the world I know that is a metaphor we all live" (273).

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 5, titled "The Warriors," investigates a 2008 rash of attacks on youths identified as "emos" (the term comes from the word "emotional"), a subculture generally identified by its musical tastes and clothing. At times, Hernandez describes being swayed by the reading by other youth subcultures and media figures of "emos" as derivative and devoid of any real substance.

<sup>10</sup> The chapter titled "Kidnapped" considers the phenomenon of kidnappings in Mexico and focuses in on the story of Silvia Vargas, the eighteen-year-old daughter of businessman and public figure Nelson Vargas. In the process of researching the story, Hernandez comments on the failures of the news media in reporting fairly on kidnappings across socioeconomic strata. When he goes to a memorial, he dresses in white as the public and mourners were asked to do by the Vargas family; for him, this signals his loss of objectivity which has him falling in line with other members of the media. He reflects: "Everyone here is playing his or her role: media, mourner, politician. Since the case broke, I had believed that I could separate myself from the frenzy of coverage on the Silvia Vargas kidnapping and not be engulfed by it, but here I am, both covering the story and wearing white myself. [...] I am unwittingly a party to the mourning and to the media storm. The kidnapping story has kidnapped me" (117).

<sup>11</sup> See note 6 above.

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