

Independent music in Ecuador

*Mestizaje, resistance and alternative media from the
Global South*

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Abstract

The terminology "Ecuadorian independent music" refers to versions of rock, pop, hip-hop, and electronic music produced in Ecuador. Considering these styles emerged in Anglo-European geographies –mainly the US and the UK– they have travelled the world and, in the process, have been integrated into the culture of multiple locations. Through an ethnographic study, I dig into the meanings of these independent music cultures and demonstrate how they have reacted against the hegemonic cultural logics of the country, the region, and the world.

Latin America and Ecuador have a mixed ethnic heritage, a major cultural determinant regionally referred to as *mestizaje*. Despite the increasing expansion of homogenising and eurocentric globalisation, *mestizaje* has remained a distinctive aspect of Latin American national idiosyncrasies. However, *mestizaje* has historically reflected and served a colonial ethos. That is a hierarchical and abusive relationship that has privileged the European over the mixed, indigenous, and black. In this context, this thesis focuses on how independent music cultures have fostered a *mestizaje* that celebrates and embraces the mixed, indigenous, and African through the music and its performance. In other words, in this thesis, I navigate the paradox of Anglo-European popular music entering a country like Ecuador to enable reconnections with the country's neglected and oppressed cultural heritages.

Nonetheless, Ecuadorian independent music is a peripheral scene that has struggled to subsist and thrive due to the precarious, repressive, and peripheral conditions of the country. In that sense, this study is also a critique of the global and local (neo)colonial structures that marginalise and devalue emerging but peripheral forms of popular music.

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In memory of Pablo Rodríguez

Introduction

"Against Oblivion", "Against the Current", "Against Geography": an introduction to music from the periphery

"*Nadie sabe dónde queda mi país*" ["Nobody knows where my country is"] is the first line of the poem "*Yo me fui por la tierra con tu nombre*" [I travel the earth carrying your name] written by the Ecuadorian poet and essayist, Jorge Enrique Adoum in 1964. More than half of a decade later, in the song "*Asnos Caso*", the Ecuadorian hip-hop collective Mugre Sur sampled a recording of Adoum spouting that line and responded to it "*En el sur del mundo, la chucha de tu madre*" ["In the south of the world, motherfucker"]. This dialogue between a dead poet and a contemporary hip-hop song that crosses more than half a century encapsulates Ecuadorian Independent music's spirit and the motivations behind this work.

"Why is Ecuadorian music unknown internationally?" and "why does it lack recognition in its own country?" are common questions that local fans and artists ask. These interrogations come out in casual conversations but have also been tackled in academic works. In her study of (traditional) Ecuadorian popular music, Ketty Wong (2012: 6) claims that upper-middle-class Ecuadorians often complain about local music not circulating internationally. Moreover, Wong asserts, there is no national style of music that the Ecuadorian society with all of its class and ethnic divisions accepts as representative of the country as a whole. These shortcomings remind me of a saying: "*un pueblo sin música, es un pueblo sin alma*" ["a country that lacks music lacks a soul"]. Indeed, the lack of recognition of its new and traditional popular music reflects a nation divided, ashamed of its differences and diversity.

The phrase "*Nadie sabe donde queda mi país*" follows a prevalent inferiority complex among Ecuadorians who have failed to find recognition among themselves and by others (Ibid.). Mugre Sur's reaction to the Adoum's voice – the angry reply "*en el sur del mundo*" followed by an expletive – is a radical response to that narrative. This hip-hop act is willing to embrace being South American and Ecuadorian shamelessly encapsulating what this music culture stands for. Ecuadorian independent music counters prevalent historical narratives that have fostered a lack

of self-recognition. This spirit is indeed the main argument of this thesis, but more content in this song encapsulates the ethos of this scene.

By bringing back Adoum's words in 2009, the hip-hop collective did more than simply pay tribute to the dead poet. In other verses of the same song, Mugre Sur celebrates the country's cultural heritage and its diversity composed of indigenous, black, and mestizo cultures, while throwing class-conscious rhymes and raging against the political elites. Ironically, hip-hop, the vehicle for that tribute and critique, is an imported style from Northern hegemonic geographies. However, this is also a music culture created by marginalised voices of black and Latino populations in US ghettos. That way, Mugre Sur reflects the paradox of what independent Ecuadorian music is: a consequence and a response to globalisation and the historically unequal power relationships that come with it.

Influenced by Mugre Sur, I borrowed some ideas from Adoum's literary work to explain my argument in this introduction. Throughout his career, Adoum tackled and reflected on idiosyncratic Ecuadorian issues. "*Yo me fui por la tierra con tu nombre*", and the context in which he wrote it is an example of that. After a military dictatorship was installed in Ecuador in 1963, the poet was exiled from the country. While in France, he wrote the poem to manifest his affection towards the country and the contempt that those in power provoked him.

Nonetheless, Adoum's intentions were not to assert that the country – its culture and history – was inferior and of minor importance. On the contrary, he sought to rebel against the notion of insignificance – embracing local culture to counter alienation. Accordingly, in a later piece, among other things, Adoum (1979:12) declared that his writing aims to go "[...] against oblivion" [*"a contra olvido"*], "[...] against the current" [*"contra corriente"*] and "[...] against geography" [*"... a contra geografía"*], ideas that resonate with the intentions, dimensions, and arguments I present throughout this thesis. As I demonstrate through different case studies, observations, and interviews, Ecuadorian independent music has faced three adverse dimensions. It has become a quest for finding a regional and national voice through a process of resignifications of the country's neglected diverse and mestizo (mixed) ethnic inheritance (against oblivion).

Moreover, this music culture has consistently resisted adverse conditions given by a repressive social and political environment (against the current). Finally, inhabiting a Global South context implies a peripheral music culture marginalised from the mainstream industries, limiting its

global and regional impact (against geography). In other words, Ecuadorian Independent music has defined itself by constantly resisting repression, cultural alienation, and globalisation.

Throughout this research, I delve into the complex meanings and significance of independent music in Ecuador, a periphery in the South of the world. I argue that finding a southern and local voice through these emerging forms of music is crucial. For that reason, I aim to answer “what is Ecuadorian independent music, and why does it matter?”. Accordingly, I focus on this music culture's ability to resist a collective sense of anonymity, globalisation, and the reinforcement of colonial structures.

In the following sections of this introduction, I establish my position as a researcher and the experience and motivations that inspired me to pursue this study. Following this, I aim to define Ecuadorian independent music. This definition involves establishing the ideas, actors, and practices that make up this independent music scene. With that context established, I then delineate the main arguments and strategies I have used to approach this thesis, explaining and justifying the sequence of sections and chapters in this work.

Declaration of motivations and my place in the research

For over a decade, I have been part of the Ecuadorian independent music scene as a media producer and researcher. In the process, I have learned that independent music cultures in Ecuador matter because they have represented the younger generations of Ecuadorians. Generations through local versions of rock, hip-hop, pop, and electronic music have found a voice. Sometimes, independent music confronts the powers that be while bringing alternative and countercultural perspectives to the notion of being Ecuadorian and Latin American. It is an attitude that has involved adopting international music styles to rethink and embrace local and regional traditions in innovative and creative ways. However, local independent music's social and cultural relevance is often overlooked, and it has struggled to exist and thrive. This lack of popularity has motivated me to promote this music, expose it to wider audiences, and document it. This thesis is the consequence and the continuation of that effort; yet, my interest in local independent music started way before I became a media producer.

As a teenager in the 1990s, accessing local alternative rock music in Ecuador was extremely difficult. Besides a few shows on small radio stations, in general, independent Ecuadorian music

would not get played on the local radio or television. This music was to be found in the street. The conditions were precarious. Local bands played in improvised locations with lo-fi equipment and would be interrupted by the police regularly.

Similarly, consuming metal, punk, hip-hop, or any other form of alternative music from anywhere in the world was not easy either. Ecuador seemed to be isolated from the international circuits of music. Eventually, cable television and the internet opened the door to alternative forms of music from Latin America, although most came from the US and the UK.

As I turned into an adult during the new millennium's early years, local independent music conditions slowly improved. Bands with fresh sounds started emerging, and music festivals incorporated these novel forms of independent music. Technological conditions for recording and putting on live events also evolved, and new and exciting acts kept emerging. The last decade has undoubtedly become a moment of further diversity and one in which musical acts revealed a vast potential. However, despite their sophistication and edginess, these independent music forms remain peripheral to international music circuits and within the same country.

In this context, and after producing a Master's Degree thesis on my city's hardcore and metal scene, I started making media content to promote the scene over a decade ago. I joined Radio COCOA, an internet-based media platform that has successfully served the purpose of connecting artists with local audiences through streaming and social media. Radio COCOA started with a clear intention: to fill in the traditional media's gap concerning local independent music. Throughout this decade, either as a media producer or as a researcher, I have been committed to promoting, telling the stories, and communicating the significance of this scene. Just as with the lack of media focused on local alternative acts, scholarly production on local popular music is also scarce. This issue is prevalent throughout the region but gets more severe in smaller countries like Ecuador. The lack of consistent and significant work on Latin American independent cultures demonstrates how marginalised and undervalued emerging music cultures from Global South contexts are. Especially considering how widespread the information about popular music from Anglophonic geographies is.

In hindsight, producing scholarly work and media to counter the imbalances produced by a world in which hegemonic cultures increasingly become global while subaltern local cultures get

obscured. As these peripheral music cultures inhabit vulnerable and adverse conditions, their ability to generate impact, reach audiences, and eventually be part of a collective cultural heritage gets reduced. This way, studying local independent music, uncovering its cultural, political, and social significance, and finding ways to amplify it turns into a postcolonial/decolonial approach. In other words, this thesis seeks to generate and disseminate knowledge confronting adverse geopolitical conditions that systematically marginalise subaltern Latin American cultures. At the same time, as I will demonstrate, it becomes a critique of prominent local conservatism, racism, and authoritarianism.

This way, producing a Ph.D. thesis about this music scene has become a continuation and a compliment to my media practice. The motivations have been the same, although the output is different. In that sense, my media practice has informed this research, while the research has informed and expanded my media practice. Being part of Radio COCOA has also defined my position in the field. I started this research process already embedded as a media producer in the context I targeted as my object of study.

Thus, aligning with a qualitative approach in popular music studies and seizing the experience I gathered over the years, I present this research as a translation of Ecuadorian independent music's meanings through thick descriptions and critical reflections of the everyday practices of local independent music. In other words, the methodology I have assumed throughout this work has been ethnographic, and there are two reasons for adopting this approach as the main method. The first is that ethnographers are required to "gain access and become witnesses" to access the codes and norms shared by the insiders of a specific context or group (Daynes & Williams, 2018). Access and subsequent understanding that requires an extended time of immersion. Consequently, by studying and producing media content about this scene over the last decade, access and experience are granted. The second is a political drive in contemporary ethnography that fits my motivations and this scene's nature. As Westbrook (2008:11) asserts, "ethnography is an enterprise of the periphery". It cares for and aims at translating the perspectives of those "outside society's main interests" of those in the margins, whether these margins are geographical or social. I must clarify that ethnography is a methodology that uses mixed qualitative methods, mainly but not limited to participant observation. I will expand on methodology and methods in chapter 2, but before that, I establish the field of this study in the following section. Such delimitation requires explaining space and time dimensions that define

the cultural settings of local independent music. It also involves determining what Ecuadorian independent music encompasses and what and whom it represents.

Setting the scene: Ecuadorian Independent music.

"Ecuadorian independent music" is more than just independent music from Ecuador. Framing independent music in a national context implies specific ideas and practices of what locally defines that notion of independence. Therefore, this section presents a local perspective of what local independent music is in Ecuador.

In its most basic definition, independent music refers to music produced and promoted by means and labels alternative to the majors (Lee, 1995; Strachan, 1995; Hracks, 2012). This perspective has generated a binary distinction with popular music produced and disseminated globally by major labels, often referred to as mainstream music. Although the difference between independent and mainstream music is much more complex, it is worth pointing out that most popular music reaches that mainstream status comes from anglophone locations such as Europe and the United States – countries where the majors are located. Since most Ecuadorian music, including local pop acts, is not part of the catalogues of majors, pretty much all Ecuadorian music could be considered independent. Nonetheless, that has not been the case.

In Ecuador, "*música independiente*" differentiates locally produced styles of music – traditionally rock but most recently electronic, pop and hip-hop – from music with a more commercial appeal and local traditional styles known as "*música nacional*" [national music]. "Independent" is a term often associated with creative autonomy and "small-scale alternatives 'outside' commercial popular culture" (Hesmondhalgh, 1999: 35). However, the local use of "*independiente*" [independent] tends to respond to further ideological connotations than merely non-commerciality. The idea of independence in Ecuador, although not exclusively, often implies notions of resistance and counterculture, for in the early decades of rock music in Ecuador (from the 1970s to the 1990s), rock was widely repressed by those in power. In Chapter 3, I present an extensive examination of rock as a resistance force in the country. However, what is essential to remark at this stage is that the rock scenes, which gave shape to independent music in the country, became an anti-establishment music culture.

Likewise, it is worth mentioning that the term "independent" became popular in the last two decades. Up to the 1990s, Ecuadorian rock music scenes would instead use terminologies such as "*movimiento rockero*" [rock movement] or "*movida underground*" [underground movement]¹. The repression repeatedly targeted *rockeros* [rockers] – a repression executed by police and military forces and often consented by a significant part of the population– certainly forced the scene's underground status. "Underground" was an imported anglophone term, but it fairly described the clandestine modus in which rock scenes operated. "*Movimiento*" or "*movida*" [movement], on the other hand, have traditionally been used by political organisations or avant-garde art movements. Hence, both terms adequately described the ideological stances that characterised rock music cultures in their early decades in the country.

Movimiento rockero underwent a significant transformation in the transition to the new millennium. As I explore in chapters 5 and 6, in the past two decades, the scene, once dominated by the rawness and aggressiveness of metal and hardcore punk, started to incorporate other sounds beyond the rock spectrum. Reggae, hip-hop, indie, electronic, pop, and the even more intense inclusion of regional and Ecuadorian music traditions built a community of fans, promoters, and artists interested in much more diverse aesthetics and ideas. This diversification did not mean that the initial underground scene's countercultural impulse faded, but it indeed ceased to be the only noticeable agenda.

Incorporating a much more extensive range of genres in and out of the rock spectrum, the underground evolved to become a scene made up of sub-scenes organised around specific styles such as hip-hop, indie, electronic pop, metal, and other alternative genres. Despite having consolidated their circuits, these sub-scenes often meet local festivals and small live events and sometimes share a similar fan base. Throughout the last decade, "*escena independiente*" started becoming the standard terminology to entitle these music cultures as a whole.

A factor that also contributed to solidifying the use of "*escena independiente*" was the emergence of "indie" bands. Acts such as Da Pawn, La Máquina Camaleón, Alkaloides, and Lolabúm brought a less aggressive, irreverent face to local independent music. In this sense, following the anglophone origin of the scene, it is worth considering that the term "independent" or "indie" is also often used to describe the aesthetics of independently produced pop-rock

¹ These terminologies are still used within the rock scenes.

music (Hesmondhalgh, 1999: 36). This way, "*escena independiente*" does not imply an ideological stance straightforwardly, yet it does not exclude it. However, Ecuadorian independent music has remained on the margins of international and local mainstream music circuits despite incorporating more seemingly commercially appealing acts. Therefore, measuring independent music significance by its popularity would be a mistake.. My proposal is that Ecuadorian independent music's significance lies in its ideological stances and ability to question and perform nationality and mestizaje in alternative and provocative ways.

The Ecuadorian in Ecuadorian Independent music: embracing and deconstructing the mestizo nation

Rock music and other pop music forms created in Anglo-European music became a global phenomenon due to the media and music industries. However, this does not imply that corporations have absolute control over popular music cultures globally. As Negus (1999:14) asserted, "industry produces culture and culture produces an industry". Music cultures are not the product of a one-way hierarchical process. Of course, with its specific characteristics, Ecuadorian independent music could not exist if it was not for the global reach of the music industries. In that sense, the core of Ecuadorian independent music happens on a grassroots level.

Consequently, in this research, I have focused on the specificities of Ecuadorian independent music. For that, I start by defining what makes Ecuadorian independent music Ecuadorian?, and whom does Ecuadorian independent music represent? Answering these questions requires looking at the regional context. Rock and other alternative music styles like hip-hop and electronic first arrived in the region due to the mass media and an industry that managed – not without restrictions– to distribute these styles. These importations of foreign forms of popular music immediately fueled local practices that shaped scenes based on them. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that these became simple reproductions or imitations of popular music from hegemonic cultural centres.

In the 1980s, for instance, throughout Latin American countries, people started referring to the rock produced in their respective countries as "*rock nacional*" [national rock]. Ironically, rock,

which arrived in the region due to capitalistic forces, eventually became "[...] an authentic movement of cultural resistance to the devastating economic marginalisation and political repression that was accompanying the structural shift toward neoliberalism" (Pacini-Hernandez, Fernández, Zolovm, 2004 location 270). As part of that process, as I explore in different ways from chapters 3 through 7, rock music and other imported forms of independent music fostered new and alternative modes of conceiving and performing national and regional identities.

One of the foremost aspects embedded in the region's notions of national identities is *mestizaje*, which, as asserted, describes the encounter between European, indigenous, and black cultures. Certainly, *mestizaje* has been a determining aspect of the region's social and cultural structures. However, *mestizaje* is a complex and paradoxical phenomenon. Two elements of Latin America that converge in the different notions of *mestizaje* are diversity and social inequality. It has simultaneously operated as a discourse that assumes and even celebrates the Latin American nations' mixed origins. Yet, the country's social structures have not matched the narrative (Wade, 2005). A white-mestizo elite has systematically excluded and exploited the indigenous and black populations. That way, *mestizaje* could also be seen as an everyday cultural practice that indigenous and black cultures have resisted (Echeverria, 2011). *Mestizaje*, in this sense, has been ambivalent as it has simultaneously reproduced and defied colonial ethos.

As I explore in many chapters of this work, Ecuador's rock and other independent music styles have fostered a deconstructive sense of *mestizaje* following a counter-cultural ethos. That is a *mestizaje* that destabilises eurocentric biases. For instance, rock music throughout the region, instead of rejecting indigenous, black, and mestizo traditions, has often revived and mixed with them. Ecuadorian rock bands not only have questioned and attacked the political class and elites but, as a counter-hegemonic act, they have incorporated indigenous sounds, customs, languages, and traditions in their song, performances, and arts. Likewise, Electronic and hip-hop music have sampled old recordings and instruments of traditional music, alternating rhymes in Spanish with native indigenous language. In Ecuadorian independent music, modernity and tradition coexist, reflecting the new Latin American urban lifestyles.

As mentioned, Latin America encompasses a vast diversity and marked social divisions. Such contrasts have been exacerbated by the increasing implementation of modern life that has not erased local traditions. As Kingman (1992:12) asserts, life within the Andean cities keeps

shifting towards modernity, but many traditional elements inherited from the rural persists. Rurality, in this regard, has become the antithesis of progress for the hegemonic Latin American idiosyncrasies. Such rural ethos is also linked to traditions, the indigenous, black cultures, the communitarian, and nature. Ecuadorian independent music, in this regard, emerged and consolidated as a mainly urban phenomenon. Most of its artists and audiences concentrate on the country's main cities. However, as I tackle in chapters 5 and 6, despite this independent music culture's urban character, there is an increasing affection towards the rural and all it represents.

The counter-cultural aspect of local independent music, which manifests through the sound, lyrics, art, and live performances, is undoubtedly a definitive aspect of Ecuadorian independent music. However, holistically approaching this scene, extra-cultural and translocal aspects demand being considered to explain Ecuadorian music's peripheral status. Hence, in chapters 7 and 8, I focus on Ecuadorian independent music consumption and distribution within global music circuits. That required examining Ecuador's relationship towards global systems of music distribution. At the same time, it involved focusing on the grassroots strategies to access and distribute music designed to skip the unfavourable conditions that come with inhabiting a periphery.

Beyond the culture: structures that make peripheries and a counter-attack

In the modern world, only specific forms of popular music reach the whole globe due to the conditions that the music industry and the media industries impose. Popular music distribution globally is widely controlled by corporate powers and the global entertainment industries (Martel, 2011, 2014). Indeed, beyond the capitalistic logic implicit in this distribution system, I argue there is a neocolonial logic. For instance, most entertainment industries have fostered popular culture from Anglo-European geographies relegating the culture from less privileged and non-western geographies. As I explore in chapter 7, Ecuador has had relatively limited access to global popular culture as many other peripheral nations across the Global South. Likewise, local popular music has barely circulated abroad. Even with the popularisation of the internet, this has not significantly changed.

It is undeniable that the internet age has revolutionised music distribution on a global scale. Even in peripheral contexts like Ecuador, the internet and new forms of digital distribution shifted how music is distributed and consumed. There have been fast changes in the first decades of the new millennium; however, this has not necessarily collapsed music industries. If anything, as later reports from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) demonstrate, the majors have regained stability and dominance (IFPI, 2017,2019).

From Ecuador's perspective, digital distribution has opened further possibilities to access international music and new options for locally distributing local popular music, including independent music. Nonetheless, Ecuador has remained a consumer of global forms of popular music, and the vast majority of Ecuadorian music circulates poorly on a domestic scale. Local independent music has kept struggling to reach local audiences, and it is still facing an adverse panorama and precarious context. Therefore, I focus on the effects of digital distribution for Ecuadorian independent music, starting with piracy to the most recent popularisation of subscription-based streaming platforms like Spotify.

Circling back to Negus' (2004) idea of the industry producing culture, Ecuadorian independent music is a product of its influence. Yet as a music culture, Ecuadorian independent music has not created an industry – at least not a successful one. And while the digital distribution has opened further opportunities to distribute local independent music, it has not significantly reached domestic and abroad audiences. As I conclude in chapter 7, streaming platforms keep the peripheries as peripheries, and the already mainstream remains mainstream. This sort of inequality could be related to one of the most provocative questions postcolonial thought has made, Spivak's (1992) "Can the Subaltern speak?". Or to Maggio's (2007) adaptation of the same question, "Can the subaltern be heard?"

As the current mainstream music distribution systems keep relegating Ecuadorian music, in chapter 8, I focus on the media alternatives that have counter geopolitical conditions over time and have made efforts to make Ecuadorian independent music be heard. I also focus on alternative media practices that have supported independent music cultures from the pre-digital age to the present day. A process in which I include my own experiences producing internet-based alternative media to amplify and document local independent music from Radio

COCOA. In this chapter, besides providing insightful information, my media practice became a source of information contributing to fostering and sustaining this scene.

Structure

This thesis does not pretend to tell the history of independent music in Ecuador. It instead aims to explore Ecuadorian independent music's cultural significance and critique the global and structural factors that marginalise it. In that sense, it follows a conventional thesis structure. Nonetheless, the lack of popular music studies produced about such scenes in the region does not make for a substantial base of works for the literature review. Indeed, this thesis may be the first doctoral study about the Ecuadorian scene as a whole².

Hence, in chapter 1, more than a literature review, I present a theoretical framework based on creating a postcolonial³ approach to studying this music scene. This critical perspective is transversal to the whole thesis, and it aims to produce knowledge from and about the contemporary South. In other words, the purpose of a postcolonial/decolonial approach I present here follows three objectives: avoiding reproducing colonial logics, critiquing and exposing the prevalence of colonial logics, and evidencing how Ecuadorian independent music counters these colonial logics. Simultaneously, narrating the South's experiences on its terms is also a strategy that seeks to expand the knowledge on the peripheral, that is, the understudied and the undervalued. Consequently, in chapter 2, I present a methodological design based on ethnography. As mentioned, an approach seeks to operate as "an enterprise of the periphery" (Westbrook, 2008:11).

² I must mention, however, that there are a few thesis and a small number of papers focused especially on rock and metal scenes. Indeed, my own Master's Degree thesis on my city's hardcore and metal scenes published in 2011 remains one of the few specialized publications on the subject.

³ There is a tendency among Latin American scholars and activists to ascribe not to postcolonial but to decolonial thinking when doing a critique of (neo)colonialism in the region. This is because prominent Latin American thinkers Anibal Quijano and Walter Dignolo entered the term "decolonialism" to counter the "internal colonialism" prominent in the Latin region. Postcolonialism is older and was fostered by the South Asian scholars from the Subaltern Studies Group with similar intellectual and political drives. Nonetheless, and considering there are important differences between the colonialism experienced within each of these regions, there are significant similarities, and, as a result, I am informed by both traditions. I tend to use 'postcolonial/decolonial' because I am focusing on both the internal logics of colonialism in Ecuador and the prevalent colonial logics of the world. Another and simpler way to put it is to assume postcolonialism as a way of intellectually "critiquing and exposing the prevalence of colonial logics" and see the decolonial as actions that confront, overcome or transform colonialism and neo-imperialism.

The following four chapters target areas I have defined as the most emblematic cultural aspects of the scene: resistance and mestizaje. Starting in chapter 3, I focus on the foundation of independent music in Ecuador as an anti-establishment music scene. For that, I study the legacy of the rock scene that from the 1970s started confronting the status-quo and facing constant episodes of repression. This rebellious ethos, which has spread to other current styles of local independent music like hip-hop, fostered alternative notions of nationalism while embracing rural and indigenous traditions in a counter-cultural way. Chapter 4 traces the influence of forerunners music styles of contemporary Ecuadorian Independent music before rock music's arrival. Ecuadorian musical nationalisms⁴ and the regional movement of *nueva canción*⁵ started a legacy of incorporating indigenous, mestizo, and black roots cultures in modern forms of Latin American and Ecuadorian music. Thus, I argue that in understanding contemporary independent music, it is imperative to understand how these music cultures approached notions of mestizaje, tradition, and nationalism.

Rock's rebelliousness and the reconnection with folk indigenous and mestizo traditions inherited from *nueva canción* established the canon for independent and alternative scenes throughout the region. Ecuador, of course, was not an exception. Thus, in chapter 5, I explore how, toward the 1990s and starting with rock, independent forms of popular music started mixing with the country's rural traditions. A hybrid perspective that started performing an alternative and postcolonial mestizaje. In chapter 6, I leave rock behind to study the latest forms of local independent music. As adopted by local independent artists, the technological elements of hip-hop and electronic music have produced innovative sounds but have also enabled a further reconnection with the country's cultural past. The concept I ascribe to understand the use of sampling technologies to remix the present with a spectral past is hauntology. In keeping with the rest of the thesis, I approach these emerging hauntological aesthetics as the expansion of a postcolonial mestizaje towards a post anthropocentric subjectivity which I describe as posthumanist.

⁴ *Nacionalismos musicales* describe compositions that started in the late 19th century and incorporated a mix of indigenous and European music cultures with the aim of fostering a mestizo national identity. Although some music nationalisms reflected a hegemonic folkloristic attempt to objectualize the indigenous, others propose avant-gardist ideas and social critique.

⁵ *Nueva canción* was a regional folk scene from the 1950s to the 1970s that assumed the rescue of indigenous, black, and mestizo traditions as a response to the alienating forms of global capitalism colonisation.

Finally, and as mentioned in the previous section, for chapters 7 and 8, I approached local independent music from its dynamics of consumption and distribution. In chapter 7, I study how local independent music has been affected or benefited in the transition to digital distribution systems. Specifically, I explore how Ecuadorian independent music has adopted and adapted to digital pirate distribution and the establishment of subscription-based streaming. And for chapter 8, I focus on the alternative media practices that form the pre-digital to the digital era that have supported, documented, and communicated local independent music.

Before delving into the first chapter, I find it pertinent to reflect on how this thesis represents Ecuadorian independent music. The act of translating a polyphonic scene like the Ecuadorian is always a partial process inevitably affected by the researcher's previous experiences and background. Pretending that what I am presenting here is an absolute portrait of the Ecuadorian music scene would be naive and authoritarian. Hence, the critical and reflexive way of facing this is by coming forward with my interests and justifying why I consider them emblematic features of Ecuadorian independent music. I intend not to portray a heroic peripheral music culture by highlighting the Ecuadorian scene's critical and postcolonial aspects. This choice aims at bringing out the elements that demonstrate that there is substance and potential for change in the music cultures that make up the independent music scene.

Nevertheless, it does not imply that I have omitted problematic and ambivalent aspects of the scene. On the contrary, the mestizo inheritance entangled with globalisation has confronted me with multiple levels of paradoxes and contradictions that I have dealt with in each of the chapters. That said, as the title of this introduction insinuates, this is an invitation to reflect on popular music from the margins. Simultaneously, this thesis aims at critiquing and confronting the consequences and agents behind that marginalisation: oblivion, the status quo, and the geopolitics that dominate the world. In other words, the arguments I present in this research aim at moving against the current, against oblivion, and against geography.

Chapter 1

From the peripheries: Strategies for studying popular music from Latin America

When I started studying Ecuadorian popular music, I immediately noticed how scarce the production of scholarly publications on and from Latin America was. However, even being in Latin America, finding works on European and Anglo-American music has been relatively easy. Although the modern world presents opportunities to foster multicultural dialogues and enable communications across distances, the study of popular music from regions like Latin America remains neglected. This contrast certainly reflects prevailing cultural unbalances between Global North and Global South cultures. In producing this thesis, I have continuously adopted and adapted ideas from Anglo-American and Anglo-European popular music studies to approach Ecuadorian music. As my academic involvement in this area has deepened, I have increasingly become aware of the urgent need to include further and generate grassroots perspectives to study the specific cultural, social, and political characteristics of Latin America. Hence, producing scholarly work about the region's popular music aims at fostering a broader, more diverse, and inclusive knowledge. This chapter presents a theoretical and critical framework for studying Ecuadorian independent music.

The gaps that separate small nations of Latin America from northern hegemonic centres like the US and the UK have become a definitive condition for how popular music is produced, consumed, and distributed throughout the world. The region's music remains marginalised from the main circuits of popular music consumption, mostly dominated by Anglo-European and Anglo-American music. Along with these, so-called independent and alternative music from Latin America has faced adverse structural conditions such as the lack of access to proper means to produce and disseminate music, repressive governments, and the inability to compete with imported forms of popular music. Hence, studying Ecuadorian forms of popular music demands a critical approach towards the structural forces that foster a globalising world. That approach, in this case, is mainly a postcolonial/decolonial one as it critically tackles issues over globalisation and historic and ongoing multicultural relations. Aligned with this perspective, a significant theoretical component of this work focuses on *mestizaje*, i.e., the culturally mixed

heritage of Latin cultures. As mentioned in the introduction, *mestizaje* is essential for understanding Ecuadorian traditional and modern forms of popular music.

Accordingly, this chapter has two sections. The first one frames this research within popular music studies and the nearby cultural studies, media studies, and musicology fields. The second and main section establishes a theoretical postcolonial framework for studying the Ecuadorian music scene. But before delving into those sections, I start by reflecting on the significance of producing scholarly work on and from the Global South.

Locating the Global South

Positioning this work within the "Global South" implies more than a geographical connotation. It becomes a matter of agency that responds to geopolitical conditions. It entails a critical approach to producing alternative narratives from and about Latin America. In that sense, a Global South perspective is also aware and critical of how power operates at national, regional, and global levels. However, it is not entirely localist. It works in a dialogical manner, as it focuses on understanding the ways local and foreign globalised ideas interact. Thus, a Global South perspective requires addressing the multiple levels of exchanges between south and north, centres and peripheries, and global and local.

At a macro level, power structures generate unbalanced geopolitical relations. Hegemonic countries have traditionally been northern regions of the globe, and less privileged regions have, for the most part, been located in the south. Such division has established a gap between privileged centres and unprivileged peripheries. For that reason, the former have been denominated either as the "third world" or, more recently, as "developing nations". These denominations, however, ratify asymmetric power relationships as they inherently imply inferiority. For instance, the less dismissive terminology of "developing countries" has been used in a context of international interventions that often aim to weaken the autonomy of these nations (Williams et al.: 27). This terminology also remarks how some countries across the southern region of the globe became the fastest-growing economies (*ibid.*). However, it implies under-development and thus suggests economic determinism.

The complex realities of the world's southern regions urgently required more acceptable terms to address them. In that context, the "Global South" concept emerged from scholarly literature

that, following a postcolonial agenda, demanded a non-pejorative terminology (Williams et al., 2008; Mitlin, 2013; Thomas-Slater, 2003). "Global" and "South" accurately address these regions' complexities and historical connotations. In the term "Global", assumptions about remoteness and isolation are replaced by a narrative of a transnational South deeply connected with the rest of the world. Likewise, the geographical connotations of the word "South" work as a trace of historical colonial power structures, implying, in that manner, a sense of agency when employing the term.

In addition to this and being consequent with my field of study, the idea of being "South" has become an identitarian aspect that has permeated Latin rock and hip-hop music that aims at subverting its prevalent negative connotations. As the influential Chilean singer Ana Tijoux (2014) claims in her "*Somos Sur*"[we are the South] song,

*Soñamos en grande, que se caiga el imperio
Lo gritamos alto no queda más remedio
Esto no es utopía es alegre rebeldía del baile
De los que sobran de la danza que hay hoy
día
Levantarnos para decir ya basta
Ni África ni América Latina se subasta*

We dream big, that the Empire falls
We shout out it loud, there is no other
option
This is not the utopia it is the happy
rebelliousness of dancing
Of those who are left out in today's dancing
Rise up to say is enough
Africa and Latin America are not for sale

In the same way, as I asserted in the introduction, Ecuadorian hip-hop act Mugre Sur got this name for expressing the group's pride in identifying as South American and being from the most working-class sector of their town, the southside. This reference to being South or *sudacas*⁶ is widespread in many Latin American alternative and independent music, demonstrating how "being South" is a notable imaginary throughout the region.

Having determined the pertinence and strategic use of the terminology "Global South" as a conceptual and geographical location for this thesis, it is necessary to trace how the region has

⁶ A pejorative term created in Spain to refer to people coming from South America.

approached the study of its music cultures. The following section describes the paths cultural studies, media studies, and popular music studies have followed in the region.

Media Studies, Cultural Studies, and Popular Music Studies in Latin America

Arguably, the more stable economic and political situations of some European countries and North America has established a more robust and extensive offer of postgraduate programs in cultural and media studies. Therefore, it is not unusual for aspiring Latin American doctoral students like myself to seek opportunities in European programs. Consequently, my condition as an Ecuadorian researcher doing a thesis from and about Latin America but responding to the requirements of a British institution has positioned me at a sort of crossroad. On the one hand, I regard this work to contribute to Latin American popular music knowledge while thinking from a Latin American perspective. On the other hand, I must find connections with the broader theoretical framework available, which for the most part, are generated by the Anglo-European academic contexts. Besides that, this is a thesis written in English.

Media and cultural studies have thrived in the United States and Europe⁷. Over the last decades, an increasing number of media and cultural studies programmes and research appeared in Latin America. However, it is hard to determine if these are original approaches or replicating European and Anglo-American schools of thought. This reflection is significant for the aims of this thesis since I consider that the study of Latin American culture deserves an epistemic strategy coherent with the region's unique history and social, political, and economic characteristics. Considering that Ecuador is deeply defined by the intersection of global and local cultures, one of the main challenges has been achieving coherence in approaching this Global South context theoretically and methodologically.

In such conditions, I have realised that dialoguing ideas from northern centres and ones produced within the region become the most coherent approach. After all, as I show throughout this work, my very case of study, Ecuadorian Independent music, is a hybrid that results from

⁷ Part of my decision to do a PhD with Birmingham City University was because Birmingham resonates with the origin of Cultural Studies, which have been crucial in the way I have approached my academic experience studying Ecuadorian and Latin popular music.

the multiple juxtapositions of northern centres and Latin American cultures. It becomes imperative to tackle the trajectory of media and cultural studies in the region, fields close to popular music. However, music has mainly been studied by other academic traditions such as musicology and ethnomusicology. Notably, in Latin America, the study of the cultural significance of music has been undertaken mainly by these traditions. Hence, I also trace the trajectory of these fields in studying the region's popular music.

Latin American media and cultural studies

In Latin America, media studies emerged in the 1970s and are often referred to as "*estudios de comunicación*". They are usually based at "*Facultades de comunicación*" or "*Facultades de Comunicación Social*"⁸. The terms used here deserve a further explanation to avoid confusion.

The equivalent of the word "media" in Spanish would be "*medios de comunicación*".

Consequently, programmes, research work, and scholars who study Latin American media do not usually frame their work within the field of "*estudios de comunicación*", which would translate into "communication studies" instead of "media studies". "*Comunicación*" simply becomes the more practical term. With the intricacies of these terminologies' translation cleared up, the question remains: what defines Latin American media studies? And in that matter, how do European and Anglo-American media studies compare with their Latin American counterparts?

It is difficult to affirm that a Latin American "school of thought" in media studies exists at an institutional level. The main reasons for this quandary are that the body of work on regional media and culture is dispersed, and it vastly follows foreign theories (León-Duarte, 2002 and Orozco, 2012). As mentioned, the structures to support what would represent a Latin American school of thought are precarious. González et al. (2017) argue that although regional networks and academic programs have emerged in recent years, publications from the United States and Europe are still much more available. Consequently, the marked tendency to over-import ideas produced in the Global North creates a body of work that lacks sufficient originality to attribute it with the distinctive term of "Latin American media studies".

⁸ [Communication Schools]. The word "*social*" next to "*comunicación*" [communication] is probably due to the influence of sociology and other social sciences like Anthropology in the study of Latin American media.

Cultural studies in Latin America, on the other hand, present a similar but far more complex scenario. Long before cultural studies were established as a field of study in Europe and the United States, Latin America had a tradition of essays reflecting the region's culture while addressing national identity, ethnicity, and power (Crespo & Parra, 2016). The emergence of British Cultural Studies and their subsequent Anglo-American version significantly impacted the way academic categories evolved in Latin America. As a result, in the 1990s, regional publications that addressed globalisation, postcolonial thinking, and the connection between culture and politics were often referred to as “Latin American cultural studies”. Even though some scholars later questioned the adoption of these terms, the impulse brought by the works of influential Latin American thinkers Jesús Martín Barbero and Nestor García Canclini significantly contributed to consolidating the Latin field of American cultural studies. Likewise, this decade saw a vast amount of work on Latin America produced by Latin scholars who were members of institutions in the United States (Ibid.).

Postcolonial studies, a research field institutionalised in the United States and Europe but based on ideas from African and Asian thinkers, directly influenced many of these works. These postcolonial studies also inspired one of the most relevant agendas of Latin American Cultural Studies: the urgency to generate original epistemologies that would not reproduce hegemonic discourses (Castro-Gómez, 1998; Rivera, 2010: 73).

Ironically, the origins of Latin American Cultural Studies started by adopting ideas produced by institutions in the “first world”, but that adoption eventually brought a critique of the reproduction of the discourses from those hegemonic regions. Moreover, this has encouraged the production of original knowledge and academic criteria from and about Latin America (Crespo & Parra, 2016: 17).

Latin American popular music studies

As asserted, this thesis on contemporary Ecuadorian independent music encompasses cultural and media studies concerns, as it is common in popular music research. In the introduction of this work, I presented a detailed description of what “independent” means in Ecuador and Latin America. However, this chapter aims to locate independent music within the spectrum of popular music. Therefore, following Wall (2013: xii), it focuses on the specific “conditions and practices of the production, textual form and consumption of [Ecuadorian independent] music to

understand how it is institutionalised [or not], what its hidden assumptions are, and how the practices produce its meanings".

In addition to that, this thesis aims to develop a critical and contemporary perspective about place and geography that contrasts with prevalent regional traditions. Over the years, popular music has gone through transformations that have evidenced a shift from music as a localised phenomenon tied to notions of national cultural identity to more global and decentralised popular music experiences (Frith, 2004). For instance, in "Sound Tracks: popular music, identity and place", cultural geographers Connell and Gibson (2002) explore how music moves around the globe generating multiple layers of connections and cultural interactions. This work questions the general idea of globalisation as the slow erasure of local traditions by popular culture distributed by global reaching cultural industries. Instead, it suggests an approach to contemporary popular music that focuses on how the boundaries between the global and local have become increasingly blurrier (Darling-Wolf, 2014).

In contrast, in Latin America, the study of popular music has been dominated mainly by musicology (which includes ethnomusicology), a field with a history of nationalist bias (González, 2018: 1). As time progresses and new work emerges on Latin popular music, this bias seems to be giving way to address the transnational implications and the hybrid conformations of Latin American popular music. Nonetheless, despite the advances, these efforts are still dispersed. Indeed, after presenting a highly detailed review of the production of literature on Latin American popular music, Juan Pablo González (Ibid., 2018: 22) concludes that "We Latin Americans do not know much about Latin America, and all of us ought to be learning more every day about this vast, heterogeneous, and surprising region. Musicologists included". In other words, although Latin American popular music is diverse and vast, its formal study and its regional and global diffusion are limited and localised.

Over the last two decades, cultural studies, race and gender critiques, and postcolonial studies influenced Latin American musicology promoting more sophisticated and critical perspectives. For instance, despite the persistence of studying national music traditions, these influences have brought into light the urgency to explore transregional genres such as salsa, cumbia, Latin rock, hip-hop, and more recently, reggaeton. Such an approach has departed from fixed positions such as nationalism to notions of mobility (i.e., globalisation, translocation, hybridity). As Corona and Madrid (2010: 4) suggest, "[m]usic is always in constant flux; music is the

perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork".

Furthermore, the influence of cultural and postcolonial studies has also established a transdisciplinary moment. Nowadays, there is a growing interest in including epistemologies from other social sciences and the humanities. The latter may suggest that the study of Latin American popular music benefits from being more interdisciplinary. Based on the use of methodologies and ideas from other fields – which also include more traditional areas such as sociology and anthropology– Corona and Madrid (Ibid.) suggest referring to works on Latin American music as “music scholarship” in a similar way to the use of “popular music studies” in Anglo-America and the United Kingdom.

With the paths that cultural, media and popular music studies have followed in Latin America explained, the next move is to elaborate a theoretical framework for tackling Ecuadorian independent music. This critical framework intends to provide a postcolonial/decolonial approach to the concepts of cultural hybridity and mestizaje, which are central discussions in this thesis and definitive aspects of Ecuadorian and Latin American music cultures.

Hybrid realities in a world of flows: mestizaje and contemporary music from Latin America and Ecuador

Global connections – i.e., the flow of people, money, information, and commodities worldwide– have become inevitable in the contemporary world (Appadurai, 1996). Now, more than ever, time and space fragmentation enabled by technological advances has redefined the concept of locality (Massey, 2005). In a world defined by movements, culture and place notions have increasingly become incompatible with ideas of stability, purity, and authenticity. In Latin America, imaginaries and traditions coexist with global ideas, and music is just one of the many expressions where that crystallises. In this section, I intend to reflect the complexity that Latin America as a cultural and historical context represents for the study of popular music. Furthermore, I aim to contribute to developing a dialogical Latin American perspective that, following Quintero-Rivera (2010: 39), could potentiate "new kinds of knowledge production". Indeed, this thesis as a whole is an attempt to further generate critical dialogues across the differences that separate north and south geographies, centres and peripheries, and the global and the local.

The 1990s saw an explosion of alternative forms of Latin music in which foreign styles of music like rock, hip-hop, or electronica mixed fluidly with traditions from all over the region. However, national borders were never a limitation for Latin musical cultures. On the contrary, Latin music has always entailed crossing "geographic, racial and ethnic boundaries" (Pancini, 2010: 2). This attribute has even been present in early Latin rock music. Take, for example, early rock n' roll hits "*La Bamba*" by Ritchie Valens or Carlos Santana's version of Tito Puente's "*Oye como Va!*" in the 1970s. Yet, before rock and transregional styles like salsa, cumbia, and reggaeton, Latin American cultures reflected border crossing racial and ethnic encounters. Such encounters built a complex network that fostered the collapse of cultures from different geographies, becoming a crucial aspect of the region's music cultures.

Mestizaje is a concept with a long tradition in the region that has constantly been reformulated to tackle issues like the mix of cultures and the ongoing encounters between modernity and tradition. Initially, it emerged to name the outcome of the Latin American countries' independence from European colonies. Following a nationalistic agenda, mestizaje described the biological and cultural crossings between the colonisers and the colonised. However, its connotations became increasingly broader. Nowadays, it encompasses a long history of shifting meanings and multiple and contrasting implications. For instance, as I show next, recent critical perspectives on the concept have focused on its critical dimensions.

As mentioned, mestizaje, on its origins, was part of homogenising projects inscribed in nationalistic and eurocentric agendas of many Latin American nations (Stutzman, 1981; Roitman, 2007). As Wade (2005: 240) explains, it represented "the creation of a homogeneous mestizo (mixed) future which is then opposed to subaltern constructions of the nation as racially-culturally diverse". Nonetheless, this notion of it is still prevalent. Mestizaje continues to be a nationalist ideology that "appears to be an inclusive process, in that everyone is eligible to become a mestizo, but in reality, it is exclusive because it marginalises blackness and indigenusness while valuing whiteness." (Ibid.).

Many thinkers argue that the original version of mestizaje coexists with an opposed logic. For instance, Echeverría (2011: 244) suggests mestizaje is at the same time an ongoing cultural logic and operates as an everyday attitude of resistance. Indeed, the author argues, the region's cultural survival has depended on its ability to mix with the foreign. Historically

speaking, this attitude originates from the indigenous populations who, by mixing with the imposed colonial cultures, found a way not to be eliminated. In simple terms: to mix has been the basis of survival for the indigenous and black cultures. This view of mestizaje resonates with the concept of hybridity. Inspired by Bhabha's ideas, John Kraniuskas (2004:40) suggests that "hybridity" is inherently a form of resistance cultural process that negotiates with power and thus generates alternative forms of modernity. A process he calls "postcolonial agency".

Hybridity is a useful concept for understanding the intricacies of cultural diversity in today's world. It allows us to depart from essentialist notions of cultural identity and binary distinctions between hegemonic centres and unprivileged peripheries (Bhabha, 1993). Moreover, Bhabha's notion of hybridity allows addressing the overlapping relationships that configure the contemporary understanding of place and location (Leonard, 2005: 133). When thinking about global connections, the concept thinks beyond "the traps of the universal and the culturally specific" (Tsing, 2005: 1). Thus, hybridity becomes flexible rhetoric that privileges contingency, fluxes, and mixture over essentialist discourses like purity, authenticity, and fixity.

Accordingly, in the 1990s, postcolonial critique may have influenced Canclini (2005) to propose the concept of hybridity to tackle the region's cultures as a mix of cultures of modernity and tradition. In his *Culturas Híbridas*, Nestor García Canclini (1990) added a Latin American perspective to the term. In it, the author affirms modernity failed to become a fulfilled project in Latin America, and many countries of the region have gone through a continuous process of adapting to the logic of modernity while generating multiple and incomplete versions of it. Likewise, Bolívar Echeverría (2011: 251) claimed that this failure is due to the diversity that has defined the Latin American region since its origins. This vast diversity has its roots in the mix of cultures between the indigenous and the colonial ways of life. Mixtures are the product of the adaptation, imitation, and reinterpretation of the hegemonic through the everyday practices of the colonised. Consequently, when the neocolonial forces that drive today's capitalism encounter the local hybrid cultural nature of the Latin Americans led to a reorganisation of ideas and practices (Echeverría, 2011). However, it is worth noting that hybridity did not displace mestizaje. It rather contributed to expanding its implications. As a result, we end up with two conflicting versions of mestizaje.

Considering that two versions of mestizaje coexist, it would be a mistake to assume that either the pessimistic or the optimistic are adequate to understand Latin and Ecuadorian cultural

expressions. They instead are in perpetual tension. For instance, when the “ideology of mestizaje” has been promoted by elites, it has served homogenising and propagandistic agendas. That is an undeniable fact that Stutzman (1981) has efficiently described. Yet, mestizaje as hybridity can tackle everyday cultural practices that are a mix and the result of negotiations with the global, the international, the culturally different, and the hegemonic (Roitman,2007). The coexistence of two contradictory meanings, the “ideology of mestizaje” and “mestizaje as hybridity”, accurately represent the complex and conflicting cultural logics that have historically dominated the Latin American region. And consequently, as I show throughout this thesis, these contradictions permeate Ecuadorian forms of independent music.

To sum up, mestizaje and hybridity are essential concepts to understand the modern and historical cultural dynamics of Latin America. In this sense, it becomes convenient to tackle how these concepts have been applied to study past and emerging forms of Ecuadorian popular music. Therefore, the following section explains how the study of traditional Ecuadorian music has used these concepts.

Notes from approaching *mestizaje* through Ecuadorian *música nacional*

Perhaps one of the most significant works on Ecuadorian music that has emerged in recent years is *Whose National Music? Identity and Migration in Ecuador* by Ecuadorian musicologist Ketty Wong (2011). Besides offering a detailed description of Ecuadorian music traditions –commonly referred to as “*música nacional*” [national music]– this work addresses their connection with mestizaje and migration. By doing this, Wong puts forward an approach that challenges the often celebratory and encyclopedic practices characteristic of the regional works on this kind of subject.

One of Wong’s (2011) most significant findings is uncovering that despite the diversity of genres and styles that make up *música nacional*, there has not been a specific style that has adequately represented the majority of the population. The author shows how Ecuadorian national music splits into two categories that mirror the social, political, and ethnic divisions that define the country. Hence, she identifies national music styles that appeal to the (white) elites and national music styles that appeal to the mestizo, indigenous, and black working-class

populations. In this sense, *música nacional* reflects the “ideology of mestizaje” that Stutzman (1981) accurately described as an “all-inclusive ideology of exclusion”.

Nevertheless, a highly diverse country unable to pick a music style as the allegory of its national identity should not be necessarily considered negative. After all, the conformation of a nation –following a modernising discourse– is inherently a homogenising project unable to tolerate diversity (Anderson, 1991). Perhaps, the impossibility of defining one emblematic music style or genre is consequent with the country’s diverse but divided society. However, as Wong (2010) extensively argues, the Ecuadorian case is not the product of collective protection of diversity but the reflection of a highly fragmented and divided society.

Even though Wong’s work comes from studying traditional Ecuadorian music – certainly a different case than mine – it effectively portrays Ecuadorian society and its peculiarities. Wong shows that mestizaje still represents a defining aspect of the country’s idiosyncrasies.

Considering this, when approaching contemporary and emerging forms of popular music in Ecuador, even from Anglo-European geographies such as rock, mestizaje is still crucial in the cultural logic behind the adoption and adaptation of these genres.

Beyond *música nacional*: publications on Latin and Ecuadorian rock

The practices and discourses around what Ecuadorians recognise as “*música nacional*” describe a set of music genres and styles inherently connected to the country’s complex cultural roots and its hegemonic notions of national identity. However, starting in the mid-1970s, the influence of Anglo-Saxon popular culture began to resonate with the country’s youth. Rock and roll music originated in the 1950s and arrived in movies, radio, and recordings. Yet, this was a slow process marked by resistance and limitations as the works of Pacini, D., Fernández, H. & Zolov, E., 2004; Cepeda, 2012, on different rock scenes in the Americas. I also focus on this aspect of Ecuadorian rock music in chapter 3.

Latin American versions of rock have not been a common field of scholarly attention. The nationalistic fixation of musicology focused on traditional forms of music. Other transnational styles of music such as salsa, cumbia, and more recently, reggaeton have also received more

attention, arguably because they are effortlessly identifiable as Latin American. Nonetheless, some exceptional works on the subject deserve recognition, to mention a few, Pancini et al. (2004) *Rock in Las Americas: The Global Politics Of Rock In Latin/o America*, also Pancini's (2010) *Oye Como Va* and Avant Mier's (2010) *Rock the Nation: Latin/o Identities and the Latin Rock Diaspora*. These works address Latin rock from perspectives close to discussions around mestizaje and hybridity while addressing specific dynamics of the genre as an expression of resistance. It is worth mentioning that they all have been published in the United States and the English language. Scholarly work in Spanish about Latin rock is not as traceable, and the scarce publications focus on national rock scenes. This shortage of publications evidences the lack of institutionalisation of scholarly research on Latin forms of popular music.

Furthermore, within and outside of the United States, several publications about Latin rock and other emerging forms of Latino popular music do not come from academic contexts but from journalists that write about music. Two examples of this are Ernesto Lechner 2006's *Rock en Español. The Latin Alternative scene*, and 2016's *Iberoamérica Sonora: 16 músicos en efervescencia creativa* [Sounding Iberoamerica: 16 musicians in creative effervescence], a compilation of articles by journalists from all over the region on emerging and innovative Latin acts.

In Ecuador, scholarly production on non-traditional forms of local music has been even more exceptional. One of the first Ecuadorian publications on the issue was Dossier's *Música, consumos culturales e identidad* [Music and cultural consumption] in Volume 18 of the academic journal *Íconos* published in 2004. The volume contains papers on cumbia, salsa, pasillo, música chicha, and two on the local rock scene for the first time. For four years, nothing was published until 2008, when a sociological study of Quito's rock scene, initially a dissertation for an undergraduate degree in sociology, was published: *El mundo del Rock en Quito* [Quito's rock world] by Pablo Ayala Román. These publications focus on Ecuadorian rock as a counter-culture or a subculture for the most part.

In 2008, when I started studying the hardcore and metal scene of my city, Quito, one of my main motivations was the lack of scholarly attention to these subjects. However, I decided to take a slightly different approach than the one previous publications were following. Instead of focusing on metal and hardcore only as subcultures, I decided to study the scene through the lens of globalisation theories. Such an approach also involved paying critical attention to gender, class,

and technology issues. Still, the main focus was understanding this local scene as part of global information flows and consumption. The originality of the work – at least for the context – was part of why it got published in 2011.

For almost ten years, no other scholarly publications specific to Ecuadorian rock have emerged. In 2019, I edited Volume 4 of the journal *post(s)*. Although the main topic of this publication was music, none of the papers focused on Ecuadorian rock. Some of them addressed local popular music but focused on the “independent scene”, which, as I explained in the introduction of this work, includes independent acts from other genres such as pop, electronic, and hip-hop. However, one significant effort to collect and reflect on local research on rock music was the *Primer Seminario de Estudios de Rock Ecuador* [First Seminar On Ecuadorian Rock Studies]. As I was part of the event’s organisation, it became evident that most people who studied local rock have not published. Many of the participants who presented papers on the seminar had produced research on rock as part of thesis projects for undergraduate and master degrees in sociology, anthropology, communication studies, and cultural studies. Some of the few who had published came from non-academic backgrounds like journalism, and most of them were self-published books.

However, it would be a mistake to divide traditional and non-traditional forms in a Latin American context. Rock and other global-reaching popular music styles such as hip-hop and electronica often incorporate elements from traditional music cultures. As I explore in chapter 3, alternative forms of popular music have followed this approach for at least four decades. Regional emblematic acts like Cafe Tacvba, Jorge Drexler, Natalia Lafourcade, Calle 13, to name just a few, have defined their styles by the intersection of tradition and modernity. Likewise, the latest evolutions of Ecuadorian independent music increasingly point in that direction. In that sense, focusing on specific music genres becomes inadequate. Instead, the alternative has been to approach music communities beyond genre and style and address other conditions that link them together. In that matter, I argue that place (e.g., Ecuador, Latin America, global), popularity (e.g., mainstream, alternative), or production and consumption attitudes (e.g., independent, commercial) sometimes become even more defining than genre and style.

Beyond rock: new approaches to *mestizaje* in Ecuadorian contemporary music

Ecuadorian rock is an example of how global ideas collapse with local ones, resulting in alternative cultural expressions. However, the spark of pioneering rock scenes evolved into diverse sounds and ideas beyond the rock. Still, it enabled connections between the global and the local and between modernity and tradition. Today's Ecuadorian independent scene has incorporated other global styles such as hip-hop and electronic music. In that sense, I argue that incorporating foreign music cultures – produced in another language and from very different cultural backgrounds– has been enabling a reformulation of local identities.

For instance, the evolution of local independent music towards the use of digital technologies brought by hip-hop, electronica, and post-rock has gone hand in hand with an interest in exploring the country's cultural past and traditions. As I study in chapter 6, today's Ecuadorian artists such as La Torre appropriate sounds and aesthetics of Ecuadorian traditional music from the middle of the 20th century in a highly sophisticated electro-pop ensemble. Others like Marley Muerto used digital sampling techniques to create compositions that mix salsa, *nueva canción*, shoegaze, and pop. Likewise, indigenous hip-hop group Los Nin rap against colonialism and capitalism, mixing Spanish and Kichwa⁹ lyrics while playing traditional Andean instruments, turntables, and laptop computers. In Ecuadorian music, thus, modernity and tradition, the global and the local, Anglo-European and Latin music tend to collapse in multiple ways. Such collapses sometimes seek to confront the colonial heritage of Latino and Ecuadorian cultures, a cultural hegemony that has historically and systematically tried to erase the indigenous and mixed origins of the region and the country. As Connell and Gibson (2002: 15) assert,

Popular music, alongside other media such as art and literature, operates at many levels, providing a platform for the expression of marginalised voices while illuminating global alliances and cultural flows. The performance and reception of popular music in particular local circumstances may be 'an effective form of resistance to the homogenising forces of the culture industry, not necessarily by producing an alternative sound, but by enabling people to experience music in distinctive localised ways' (Smith 1994: 237).

⁹ Kichwa is an indigenous language prevalent in many of the Andean ethnic groups of Ecuador.

As an increasing number of Ecuadorian electronic, hip-hop, and rock artists are approaching tradition, notions of hybridity and mestizaje become even more significant to decode the cultural meanings generated in this scene. In that matter, one of the essential aims of chapters 3 to 6 is to address how the contemporary Ecuadorian scene is re-thinking and shifting the meaning of mestizaje through independent forms of music. Yet, studying the dynamics of music production and consumption in this particular scene requires addressing other kinds of discussions such as media, technologies, and industry, which are central in chapters 7 and 8.

Thinking global media, industry and music from Latin America: a postcolonial/decolonial approach

Following a holistic approach, the study of independent music from Ecuador must consider going beyond the cultural significance of this music culture. Systems of distribution and media are definitive aspects of any music culture. Accordingly, popular music studies have traditionally tackled media and industry aspects (Wall, 2013). Media and technology are certainly among the most defining aspects of today's music, from grassroots music cultures to the global music industries. Therefore, producing a conceptual framework to study Ecuadorian independent music's media and industry dimensions becomes imperative.

The past decades have seen significant changes in how culture is consumed and distributed through media and technologies. The advent of the internet marked a new moment, establishing a division between old and new media. The popularisation of the internet pushed a paradigm shift towards a more democratised access to information that came with a novel notion of empowered audiences (Jenkins, 2006). The internet became an offer to get expand music consumption and distribution. Indeed, for artists in peripheral locations, the internet in part facilitated reaching further audiences, as it destabilised the mediation of the global entertainment industries (Kusek et al. 2005).

However, in a world of unprecedented connection, access to information, and possibilities of participation, little has changed in how corporations articulate hegemonies and control culture distribution. In that sense, besides focusing on celebrating the possibilities of new technologies, it is pertinent to address how capitalism has kept expanding, and the dominance of the Global

North over culture has remained in the current digital systems of music distribution (Corona & Madrid, 2010:9; Ponzaneezi, 2014). In other words, it is crucial to study how Anglo-European popular culture is still getting a wider distribution and global reach than popular forms of music from Latin America, Asia, or Africa.

In the case of music, during the early 2000s, the novel ability to share digital files through peer-to-peer services such as Napster destabilised the majors for a couple of years. However, for 2019 the majors made over 1 million dollars per hour due to streaming platforms (MBW, 2019). The consolidation of streaming corporations and geo-blocking systems, big data, and the oligopolistic nature of social media suggest the world of new media is moving towards more privatised access to information and, in that matter, to culture. The excitement the popularisation of the internet once generated is fading away. Jenkins' enthusiastic views about the possibilities of participation described in his convergence theory seem more and more obsolete. However, the author was correct when he asserted that we are witnessing converging times "where grassroots and corporate media intersect" and "where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins, 2006:2).

Hence, instead of focusing on the distinctions between old and new, the most suitable approach for facing today's media and industries landscape would be tackling the ongoing tensions between technologically enhanced public space and a money-making machine moved and controlled by big corporations. Although 98% of the biggest corporations that run the Internet today do it for profit¹⁰, individuals, communities, and small organisations from all over the world are continuously finding ways to go around these adverse structures. In other words, as corporate dynamics manage to keep control over the Internet, grassroots strategic reactions keep emerging while expanding plurality and nonvertical geopolitical relationships.

Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that popular culture distributed by global industries operates only as a "top-down ideological imposition" (Ponzaneezi, 2014: 2). Narratives of mainstream and marginalised underground cultures are common in popular music cultures, but the ways global industries and audiences around the world interact are simply more complex and contingent (Wall, 2013: 5). Likewise, in academic contexts, the perspectives regarding popular culture tend to fall into contrasting accounts. Popular culture studies informed by

¹⁰ Wikipedia is one of the few top 100 non-profit exceptions (van Dijck, 2013:16)

postcolonial critiques (as this work) have often tended to endorse overly celebratory narratives, contrasting the dismissive accounts about popular culture from political economy and critical theory (Saha, 2018). In this sense, it becomes imperative to go beyond biased perspectives and look at the issue as a double-sided dynamic by which “industries produce culture and culture produces industries” (Negus, 1998: 360). Consequently, while my approach towards global cultural industries and prevalent media and technological ecosystems focuses on the structural conditions they impose, it does not underestimate grassroots forms of agency that adopt, adapt, and (or) subvert such conditions.

Debates about hegemonic industries and people being empowered by modern technological advances have been essential in critical theory, media, and cultural studies. In his widely-celebrated essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin (2021) [1935] highlighted the democratic possibilities of reproduction technologies. On the other hand, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer* (2002) [1947] emphasised the homogenising and proto-fascist outcomes of the same technologies. Without attaching exclusively to either of these perspectives, it is evident that they are still crucial to understanding the complexities of culture and media now potentiated and expanded by digital technologies. In that regard, the consequences of the internet and derived digital forms of music distribution have at times empowered the people; they have also reinforced hegemonic (eurocentric) systems. Hence, I focus on studying how Ecuadorian independent music cultures and their counter-cultural ethos have kept emerging even though global music industries and their eurocentric biases have expanded in the digital age.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I started by describing the context and state of Latin American studies of media, culture, and popular music. With that covered, I detailed the relevance of hybridity and mestizaje as critical perspectives for studying Latin American and Ecuadorian music as a set of meaning-making expressions. Finally, to complement this culture-based approach, I elaborated a postcolonial approach to critically study the media, industry, and technological structures that contribute to the marginalisation and dissemination of Ecuadorian independent music. It is worth mentioning that while the following chapters tackle issues such as mestizaje and incorporate a postcolonial/decolonial perspective, they also present specific conceptual issues frameworks that expand these discussions and open new ones. The next chapter presents a methodological

strategy to confront the complexities of studying Ecuadorian independent music through a critical approach.

Chapter 2

A nomadic strategy and the place of music ethnography in the XXI century

Based on the Ecuadorian independent music scene's peripheral condition, I established a critical theoretical framework for its study in the previous chapter. This approach addresses the complexity of the scene's hybrid nature and the mestizo heritage of Ecuadorian culture. It also seeks to question the eurocentric bias that has traditionally determined the global distribution of popular music and the scholarly knowledge produced about it. Hence, I unwrap a methodological strategy consequent with the theoretical approach. A methodology that I argue follows an ethnographic strategy.

Ethnography is a field-based qualitative approach that aims at understanding social life from the perspective of their participants (Levy, 2019: 134). Ethnography, originally conceived as the study of the other, has come a long way to be a methodology focused on uncovering the diversity within the same societies of the researchers and previously colonised societies, now considered part of the same global system (Gubber, 2004: 36). Thus, today's ethnography follows two principles: the quest for diversity and the actors' perspective in the cultural setting studied. As this chapter aims at explaining, both of these principles adequately serve the critical framework of this research. Ethnography's insider perspective speaks of a flexible methodology that adapts to the specific conditions of Ecuador. Thus, it also becomes imperative to define the specifics of the field this ethnographic work tackles.

Ecuadorian independent music is not a purely national phenomenon. As asserted, it derives from the influence of global music styles. That means that a strictly site-specific notion of ethnography would be at odds with the nature of this music scene. However, recent ethnographic perspectives have shifted towards a translocal idea of the field. As Denzin (2006: xii) asserted, "[a]s that culture has gone postmodern and multinational, so too has ethnography". Thus, I respond to this call of developing a cosmopolitan ethnographic perspective that could think and act beyond the limits of the nation. Accordingly, I ascribe to what Braidotti (2011: 216) refers to as a "nomadic vision" that follows two requests: to set forth locations in terms of time

and space and to provide alternative representations of these locations that consider their contingency and mutability.

Hence, this chapter starts by defining the specifics of this ethnographic study and my position in the field. As argued, the 21st-century field's notion demands reconfigurations in terms of adjusting to the temporal and spatial dynamics of the contemporary world. For the specific characteristics of this research, these adjustments imply developing an ethnographic design that focuses on historicity, and that can tackle three different levels of interaction: the national (the Ecuadorian), the regional (the Latin American), and the global, all of which intersect Ecuadorian independent music. At the same time, in thinking of the place as a transnational compound, I aim to develop a strategy that addresses Ecuadorian independent music meanings and cultural significance and the structural forces that marginalise it¹¹. I reflect on ethnography's limits to accomplish this by itself and propose a combination of ethnography with critical theoretical perspectives to tackle the micro-interaction and the macro structures that circumscribe Ecuadorian independent music. Therefore, what follows explains the philosophy of the methodology of this work complemented by a theorisation of how critical ethnography can follow a nomadic perspective.

Ethnography as methodology and my position in the field

Ethnography is hardly a standardised and strictly defined methodology; it is somewhat flexible and adapts to specific needs of the sociocultural contexts it studies (Guber, 2001: 22). However, in an attempt of coming up with a proper and broad definition of what ethnography does in terms of data collection, Hammersley & Denzin (2007: 3) describe it in the following terms:

[...] ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. Generally speaking ethnographers draw on a range of sources of data, though they may sometimes rely primarily on one.

¹¹ But which it also resists and attempts to overcome.

Although it is not uncommon to consider ethnography as a method, it is important to assume it as “a methodology constituted by multiple methods” (Lillis, 2008: 355). What defines its ethos is the approach to data and culture from an insider position. That may explain why participant observation is its more emblematic method¹².

Moreover, in highlighting ethnography’s qualities as a methodology rather than a method, I aim to illustrate two characteristics of my ethnographic approach. The first is that I have gathered information from multiple data sources and through different qualitative methods as an ethnographer. The second is that while not all of these methods are strictly participant observation, all of the data reflects a direct involvement with Ecuadorian music’s context and aims to understand its complex situated meanings and practices.

Accordingly, the ethnographic study of this music scene has implied getting involved and participating in a wide range of activities related to this music culture. For the specific needs of each of the following chapters, the data I analyse comes from my observation of events such as festivals and small gigs; conversations and semi-structured interviews with a wide range of actors like artists, producers, promoters, and journalists; close readings of songs, music videos, flyers and album covers; and archives of obscure bands and gigs.

Nevertheless, it would be deceiving to assert that the information I have included in this thesis came only from a specific number of formal interviews, observations, and close readings of music, lyrics, videos, and flyers that I started gathering after formally producing this thesis. Each of the chapters that follow does combine these methods in different ways. However, they also contain information I got access to before I started this thesis or were collected for other purposes such as producing multiple forms of media content. It is worth mentioning that a significant part of my perspective and interpretation has been shaped by informal and everyday activities such as conversations with colleagues, friends, producers, and artists, and, of course, going to and being part of the production of live events.

Likewise, consuming independent music and being an Ecuadorian fan since I was a teenager has played a significant role in informing this thesis. Most of the following chapters show how Ecuadorian independent music often tackles ideas and discourses about place, history, and traditions. These are ideas that to be further appreciated and comprehended benefit from an

¹² However, it is important not to reduce ethnography to participant observation.

affective connection with Ecuadorian culture. Of course, my nationality and the everyday experiences in the place I inhabited my whole life have benefited my understanding and appreciation of this music culture. As Low (2017:146) asserts, “[e]motion and affect are key elements in the creation, interpretation, and experience of space and a constitutive component of place-making.”

In other words, I did not necessarily “enter a field” and started doing this research project from scratch. When I formally started this research process, I was already immersed in the field. That is not to say that in producing this thesis, I have not deepened my perspective and sophisticated my recollection of information. However, this process has been dynamic and does not prioritise or separate the formal and structured from the everyday. Simply put, because of my nationality and cultural heritage, I am represented by Ecuadorian independent music and inhabit the context that produces it. Indeed, this defines my position as an insider of this music culture¹³.

Of course, being an insider is an advantage as it allows skipping the process of accessing the field through gatekeepers’ help at the start of this ethnographic study. As I asserted in the introduction, the fact that I have been a media producer doing research on the scene for over a decade, besides granting me access, implies that I have been collecting and producing information beyond and parallel to this thesis. In addition to that, I have been close to other scene’s journalistic researches authored by my Radio COCOA¹⁴ colleagues. This closeness has not only granted access to a significant amount of secondary information – some of which I have quoted throughout this thesis – but has also served as an insightful perspective for what it means to produce alternative media on the scene, the main subject of chapter 8.

Having defined the position from which I conducted this ethnographic study, what follows is a definition of the temporal and spatial characteristics of the field. Logically, I am studying the contemporary Ecuadorian scene, but “contemporary” and “Ecuador” do not necessarily imply a

¹³ It is worth noting that closeness and familiarity may become deceiving as they could make the researcher assume that she already knows enough about the context studied. In that regard, Daynes & Williams (2018: 70) suggest taking an outsider’s position even when the researcher is a part of the group studied. Accordingly, doing an ethnographic study of this music culture has implied going through a reflexive process of detaching myself from my familiarity with the scene to see it with openness and strangeness. Nonetheless, the latter are attitudes necessary for producing quality journalistic content about the scene. Furthermore, it is worth clarifying that “critical distance” does not imply a pretension of neutrality. As I asserted in the introduction, I aim to explain why Ecuadorian independent music matters.

¹⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, Radio COCOA is a media platform dedicated to documenting and disseminating Ecuadorian independent music, which I have been part of for over a decade.

mere moment and a fixed location. There are multi-temporal and multi-spatial dimensions that converge in Ecuadorian independent music. As noted, Ecuadorian music cultures have enabled cross-temporal dialogues between modernity and traditions. Hence, I tackled the scene's previous decades and even music cultures that came before it emerged to understand the contemporary. Likewise, Ecuadorian independent music geographic multidimensionality demands deconstructing established ideas of what counts as a field. Thus, in the next section, I explain the temporal characteristic of my ethnographic approach. Following that, I do a reflexive theoretical analysis of the field in the 21st century that describes the multi-spatial dimensions of this ethnographic study.

Ethnography of the future past

Some chapters of this thesis explain the contemporary independent scene through events, figures, and styles from previous decades. Chapters 3 and 4, for instance, focus more on the past than they do in the present time. The first explores the origins of Ecuadorian independent music as a rock scene that started emerging in the early 1970s. And the former focuses on the similarities and influence that national and regional music cultures like Ecuadorian musical nationalism and *nueva canción* have had in the contemporary scene. Each chapter addresses two definitive aspects that explain the origins of the independent scene. Studying the present by exploring the past aligns with what Hirsh and Stewart (2005) describe as “ethnographies of historicity”. It is worth mentioning that the concept of historicity does not imply simply writing history but understanding the past-present-future continuum. An ethnographic approach to historicity rather

[...] draws attention to the connections between past, present and future without the assumption that events/time are a line between happenings “adding up” to history. Whereas “history” isolates the past, historicity focuses on the complex temporal nexus of past-present- future. (Hirsh and Stewart, 2005: 262).

Consequently, my argument is that the early decades of rock in Ecuador established a counter-cultural ethos still prevalent in independent music. Similarly, Ecuadorian music nationalism and the regional movement of *nueva canción* proposed integrating subaltern traditions from the rural, the indigenous, and black cultures that counter the eurocentric logics of the Ecuadorian mestizo nation. These past music cultures have influenced or were similar in spirit to current independent acts and how they have been approaching these same traditions but from rock, pop, electronic, and hip-hop music ensembles. Moreover, as I argue in chapter 6,

even for the most futuristic and innovative avantgarde independent acts, previous music cultures like Ecuadorian nationalism are still sources of ideas and aesthetics that inspire music innovation¹⁵.

Hence, to study these pasts, I rely on a mix of methodological strategies that I consider ethnographic. Besides analysing songs and lyrics from emblematic artists of other eras –perhaps the most obvious way of tackling the past in popular music studies– I got access and explored archives like flyers, zines, and books covering figures and moments of the scene. I also included primary and secondary sources like publications containing interviews or studying important figures like Pancho Jaime and Jaime Guevara¹⁶. On the more conventional ethnographic side, I as well make accounts from participant observations of live events and conduct interviews with key figures of specific moments. For instance, in chapter 4, I conducted an in-depth interview with Pedro Pino, a Chilean artist who, after migrating from Chile, in 1974 started Amauta. This ephemeral experimental ensemble fused Ecuadorian traditions, *nueva canción*, rock, jazz, and classical music. And although Amauta's short career went unnoticed, their strategy of combining local traditions with experimentation announced what came in the following decades of the Ecuadorian independent music scene. In that sense, recounting Amauta's short trajectory sheds some light on the connections between local and regional music traditions and contemporary independent music cultures.

Similarly, in chapter 5, I focus on the parallels between independent music live events and *fiestas populares* (carnavalesque traditional and rural celebrations that perform rituals that collapse mestizo and indigenous cultures). An emblematic element of these celebrations is the *diablo-huma* or *aya-uma* (a devil-like character), whose traditional mask has become an emblematic element of independent music concerts. The mask, in that sense, has come to symbolise the connections between the worlds and temporalities of the traditional, rural, and indigenous with the global, modern, and urban independent music culture. Hence, through my observations of live performances and interviews with the artists who first introduced the mask

¹⁵ Basically, all of the acts I present in chapter 6 reflect a futuristic approach inspired by traditions. However, some examples I can mention without entering into much detail are electro-pop ensemble LaTorre which inspires in the golden age of Ecuadorian music nationalism, or electronic producer Quixosis who has been producing electronic music sampling an archive of traditional Ecuadorian music from the long-gone label Caife.

¹⁶ Despite being an underground cult figure for rock scenes, Pancho Jaime's work has been well documented in academic works and alternative publications. The work of Pablo Rodriguez who self-published magazines, books, and documentaries on the rock scene, has been incredibly helpful, as I mentioned in chapter one.

and elements taken from *fiestas populares*, I address how contemporary Ecuadorian music fosters an alternative sense of mestizaje that embraces and is not ashamed of its indigenous roots. Indeed, the *aya-uma*'s presence as a source of rebelliousness and innovation symbolises the prominence of roots in these alternative spaces.

These are some examples of how I had to deal with past events from an ethnographic perspective through this thesis. Although being more about the present, some of the other chapters required, to a greater or lesser extent, delving into the past as a way of providing a base context for explaining the contemporary. For instance, chapters 7 and 8 focus on digital distribution systems and alternative digital media and tackle the pre-digital and pre-streaming forms of distribution that went on decades earlier. However, it was necessary to tackle how the distribution and media happened before the digital in Ecuador to understand those issues. The ethnographic strategy to tackle that past was similar to the other chapters. That is a combination of interviews with artists, label managers, and media producers, my observations, and accounts as a consumer of independent music.

Although all chapters include interviews and participant observations, the most typical ethnographic methods rely heavily on analysing documents such as lyrics, music videos, and album arts. However, I still consider these part of an ethnographic approach for my embedded experience and insider perspective allowed me to determine the relevance and significance of these documents. Having explained the temporal dimensions of my ethnographic strategy in the following sections, I reflect on its spatial dimensions.

The field in the 21st century and the politics of place

Studying popular music from the Ecuadorian independent scene's localised experience cannot avoid reflecting on globalisation. As stated, Ecuadorian independent music produces connections between global styles and local cultures. Nonetheless, it continues to be peripheral and reaches, for the most part, only local audiences. Global connections are not equally accessible, and notions of centres and peripheries are still relevant. For this reason, this thesis required designing a method capable of dealing with the complexities of globality while establishing a critical perspective towards structural imbalances. This approach implied going beyond the practical use of a method and instead designed a methodology that acts as a "cultural critique" (Marcus and Fisher, 1986).

Achieving that critical approach to ethnography demands critically approaching globalisation, a concept that is always at risk of being applied one-dimensionally as a homogenising process. While global uniformisation is one of the effects of globalisation, it is not the only one. Appadurai (1996) and Beck (2000) describe globalisation as a paradox: a process in which hegemonies are permanently expanding, but a world in which cultural diversity persists.

As I argue in chapter 3, Ecuadorian independent music started by replicating British and Anglo-American rock music in the early 1970s. And, as I show in chapter 5, the adoption of rock music and its derivatives did not erase local music traditions but fused with many of them in the new millennium. Ironically, young fans from urban areas could find scraps of local music traditions in local rock. The former demonstrates that globality and locality's opposing forces are in perpetual tension and could generate unexpected outcomes.

In later years, tensions increased. The world is facing the emergence of an anti-globalist agenda evident in Brexit, the institution of anti-migrant policies in the US, and the consequent spread of proto-fascist governments worldwide, including in Latin America. As Salter (1998:650) argues, globalisation "can exist side by side with a tendency [...] towards the reassertion of an inner-directed gaze and a return to the national, regional and local." However, people, culture, and ideas continue to move –physically and rhetorically– despite mobility restrictions. It is increasingly imperative to assume movement as not necessarily fluid but rather "awkward, unequal, unstable" (Tsing, 2005:4). Simultaneously, in terms of culture, capitalism and its imperialistic geopolitical logic tend to jeopardise diversity and the cultures in non-hegemonic locations. Thus, sustaining a notion of place or locality could sometimes be an act of resistance towards homogenising practices.

For the social sciences and the humanities, the focus on place, recognised as a context capable of producing meaning, was an intentional rupture with the natural sciences' objective and universalist approach. This rupture was also fuelled by postmodern and postcolonial criticism that proposed a departure from great metanarratives such as eurocentrism (Derrida, 1966; Lyotard, 1984). Likewise, feminist critiques brought an epistemological awareness towards questioning established notions around voice, authority, and representation (Harding, 1993; Hill-Collins, 1990; Smith, 1987). Consequently, knowledge production in the social sciences moved from objectivity and universality to the "partial and situated" (Haraway, 1988). In addition

to feminism, other critical schools of thought such as critical race theory, queer studies, and postcolonial theory generated perspectives that aimed to grasp the marginal, mobile, specific, and subjective experiences. Indeed, these conditions offered a contrasting value to hierarchical structures like capitalism and colonialism (Leavy, 2009: 213-214).

It is worth considering that even before these critiques emerged, ethnography was already a method that addressed culture from the site-specific and the everyday (Marcus and Fisher, 1986). Nonetheless, its origins followed a romantic colonial fixation on cultures outside the modern West. Cultural anthropologists typically travelled to distant exotic locations to encounter the everyday life of non-westerners. However, the world has gone through fast transformations that have fractured conventional notions of time and space. The exotic and distant non-west is more a fictional narrative than a social reality. In this sense and following Grossberg (1989), Cohen (1993) argues that

[...] anthropology's focus upon the 'other', its boundaries between us and them, bear little relation to the situation of ethnography within the contemporary advanced industrial world of mass media, where the relationship between the strange and the familiar is increasingly difficult to define, and it is increasingly difficult to locate and identify consistent, isolable communities or bodies of texts and practices which can be taken as constitutive of the culture or the community. (Cohen 1993:125)

Unfixing place: on mobility and popular music studies

To confront the complexities of time and space in the contemporary world, the so-called “new mobilities paradigm” brings important and valuable ideas. Informed by perspectives like anthropology, cultural studies, geography, migration studies, the paradigm emerged as a critique of the conventional sedentary approaches of social science research. As Westbrook (2008) asserts:

The maps have no more blank white spaces; the islands have run out. While there are still many different cultures, it is much harder to be sure what makes cultures different from one another. Life on the island, any island, is deeply shaped by national, regional, and global, economic, social and political developments. Places are becoming less isolated, and anyway, isolation is no longer any guarantor of difference (Westbrook, 2008:10).

Indeed, social relations and cultural interactions are now hardly contained in specific locations. Global flows of information, cultures, commodities, and people complicate defining spatial limits. Perceptions of place have significantly shifted, and thus many challenges have emerged for

most traditional research methods, especially those that follow a place-based approach (Sheller & Urry, 2004). Straightforwardly defining a “field of study” increasingly becomes a challenge (Gille and Riain, 2002:271). Methods like ethnography initially approached culture from the everyday, and face-to-face interactions need to adapt to the current conditions.

Studying popular music has always been a complicated task. Music is, in fact, an exceptionally mobile cultural expression that crosses national borders, generating multiple cultural encounters and unexpected connections (Connell and Gibson, 2003). Thus, a mobility-based approach seems pertinent to address music’s mobile nature. However, focusing on music’s mobile condition may seem incompatible with the place-based perspective of ethnography. Should the place-based then be abandoned and replaced with a view focused on mobility and contingency? Not necessarily. Even in the highly dynamic flows that we experience today, fixed notions about borders, nationality, locality, traditions, and place are not becoming less relevant. However, ideas of place are becoming increasingly deterritorialised.

Several popular music studies have tended to focus on place and mobility in the last three decades. In the process, they started to address localised music experiences on its transterritorial dimensions (Cohen, 1995; Connell & Gibson, 2003; Leyshon, Matless, and Revill, 1998; Lashua, B., Spracklen, K. & Wagg, S., 2014). These works analyse music and place by emphasising two characteristics: a) they are mutually constituted, meaning that place generates music while, at the same time, music generates place, and b) music is a mobile cultural phenomenon that enables a wide range of connections between multiple locations. Cohen (1995: 444), in that regard, argues that “[i]ndividuals can use music as a cultural map of meaning, drawing upon it to locate themselves in different imaginary geographies at one same time.” Similarly, geographers Connell and Gibson remark music’s nomadic and border crossing capabilities:

Music, like all forms of sound, is inherently mobile. Mobility also involves movements of people, and the music they bring with them [...]. Recordings themselves move like objects –as treasured artefacts of lives and places, traded through migrant links across countries, underpinning musical economies or sustaining diasporic connections. (Connell and Gibson, 2002: 45).

Such focus on place and its mobile character also destabilises notions of authenticity, fixity, and other essentialisms often tied to the peripheries. On the contrary, mobility-based studies focus on resisting, transforming, and becoming hybrid rather than fixed, pure, and unchanging. Such

an approach is especially relevant for Global South locations. For instance, Latin America's indigenism and economic struggles have made it susceptible to objectification and fetishisation as exotic and pre-modern depictions that have overshadowed the region's contemporaneity (Canclini, 1995; Rigg, J. 2007). Indeed, as Rice (2003) suggests, properly connecting ideas of globalisation and the ethnographic study of music could potentially be a strategy to de-essentialise the representation of music from the peripheries. Likewise, approaching ethnography through the lens of critical globalisation theories can create more accurate and complex depictions of the peripheries. Representations that do not reproduce dichotomic perspectives such as tradition against modernity, heroic "anti-hegemonic thought and action", and diversity counter homogeneity (Rice, 2003: 154).

To sum up, following the new mobilities paradigm, the ethnographic study of popular music should tackle two characteristics of the XXI century notion of place. The first one is that shared memories and affections that transcend territorial dimensions create an idea of a site. Secondly, a place is not fixed, unchanging, or essential; notions of place are in constant mutation and become increasingly hybrid as they are constantly affected by other locations. Accordingly, although nationality defines my study of the Ecuadorian independent music scene, what I mean by "Ecuadorian" is not a mere physical territory but transterritorial and shifting imagery. As the next section argues, Ecuadorian independent music hybrid ethos allows it to challenge essentialist and hegemonic notions of the nation.

On the significance of reporting from the margins

My first experience researching popular music was an ethnographic study that examined how hardcore and metal, both global styles, were adopted and adapted in twenty-first-century Ecuador. The hardcore and metal scene was very close to me, and thus that research represented a first approach to the study of a very familiar context. As this is the second time I am approaching an ethnographic study of local popular music, I face a more diverse but certainly more exciting scenario where a lot has changed. For instance, the quality and variety of work produced have expanded. Also, because of social media and streaming platforms, local music is now more accessible. Nonetheless, the sense of locality expressed by the music is even more prevalent than it used to be. As chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate, the scene further explores local idiosyncrasies and traditions more intensely and innovatively.

For the first ethnographic experience, “*Prevén tú la muerte*”, a song that covers parts of the Ecuadorian national anthem by the metal band Descomunal, inspired and motivated my research curiosity for the connection between the global and local enabled by music. Fifteen years have passed, and a song and an album by a different band provoked similar reflections. The band Lolabúm released *Tristes Trópicos* [Tristes Tropiques] (2018), which borrows its title from one of the most celebrated anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss. One of the album singles, “*El Ecuador*”, is an indie-pop ballad that seems to be about a love relationship getting disrupted by digital technologies. However, what makes the track special is its unconventional outro: a series of samples taken from discourses of former Ecuadorian presidents pronouncing “*el Ecuador*” followed by a three-second sample from the national anthem that prolongs with a delay effect. The song’s brilliance lies in how it combines something personal and common-place, such as having digital media affecting personal relationships within the collective metanarrative of the nation. Lyrics like “Ecuador gets frozen in front of your hands” [*se congela el Ecuador frente a tus manos*] might sound corny, but the samples at the end reveal that this is more than a love song; it is instead an existential reflection of what is like inhabiting Ecuador.

The song’s video shows the band roaming through the empty field and stands of the Atahualpa Stadium, the national football team’s home, so it is a place that evokes patriotism in most locals. The song’s intention is not to resent the Ecuadorian nationality, but it does point out the banality of nationalism. The video’s description for the song on YouTube ironically starts with the phrase “*¡Qué viva la patria!*” [“Long live the homeland!”]. Lolabúm is sending the message that nationalism is empty, and despite digital technologies, we are still rooted in the country. In the end, the song confronts us with a paradox: the relevance and irrelevance of inhabiting this country.¹⁷

The sense of belonging to a nation not only operates as the container of a shared history, culture, and language; in some cases, it also imposes limits and limitations. In current world conditions, it is fair to say that places like Ecuador experience an awkward position: they have

¹⁷ Allow me to present another anecdote that illustrates the collective feeling of irrelevance. A couple of years ago, Robert Smith from The Cure was interviewed by an Argentinian TV station about the band’s upcoming Latin American tour. Annoyed, Smith replied by saying: “We are going to play in every... no, not every Latin American country. We are not going to play in Ecuador ... because people don’t go to Ecuador.” The video was uploaded to YouTube and immediately became viral in Ecuador. Local music fans expressed rage and frustration in the comments, while others had a condescending laugh about it. Nevertheless, it shows how isolated Ecuador is from the rest of the world in terms of popular music.

unprecedented access to global culture, but they remain on the margins. Such contrast reveals one of the paradoxes and contradictions of globalisation: an increasingly connected but fragmented world.

However, this paradox justifies ethnographic studies that could respectfully account for cultures from the peripheries. Or as Westbrook (2008:11) explains,

The fact that there are no more islands does not mean that there are no margins. There are always margins, and the job of the ethnographer is, now as ever, to report from the margins. As global society shifts, cultural anthropology simply reorients itself to begin its work, to talk to marginal people, wherever they may be found. The political purpose of ethnography, in this view, remains unchanged, that is to rediscover the humanity in the peripheral subject.

As asserted, one of the unexpected outcomes of globalisation is empowering a sense of locality. “It can strengthen local regulation, bolster and empower local groups, strengthen and revivify local cultures, while localities can both shape and respond to global processes.” (Rigg, 2007: 11). However, it is fair to point out that cultural difference often implies precarity. Imaginary processes may mould notions of place, but this is not to say that there are no material conditions implicated. However, the fact that unprivileged locations keep producing cultural diversity despite adversities is a matter of agency. An ethnography of the periphery is an ethnography on ways of life that find ways to thrive against the odds. For that reason, the peripheral condition of some places becomes definitive (Gibson, 2012: 7).

Under this scheme, the ethnography I am proposing explores the grassroots connections and the unrooted aspects of the local. In other words, this research deals with the transnational nature of today’s Ecuadorian popular music. Moreover, this ethnography addresses music that expands on hierarchical interactions between the national, the regional, and the global. In this sense, it is concerned with uncovering the significance of emerging Ecuadorian music and enabling a reflection on how this scene fits in the world's current state. Therefore, this thesis intends to translate Ecuadorian independent music meanings and address the precarity it faces. Meaning that this is more than an ethnography that tackles multiple locations, but multiple levels or scales.

From the periphery: The multi-sited and multi-scalar

Living in Ecuador does not only mean inhabiting a country; it also implies inhabiting a region, Latin America. Music cultures often intersect regional, national, and global levels. Indeed, indigenous and Afro-Latino music traditions and a mix of the former with euro-colonial music heritages inhabit most Latin American countries. There are styles like cumbia, salsa, and reggaeton that have reached regional and global scales. At the same time, there are also versions of initially anglophone styles, including pop, reggae, and everything in the rock spectrum that sometimes stay local. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that music from the region is inherently transnational. Still, it would also be a mistake to think that Latin America is purely Latin, meaning indigenous, African-American, or mestizo. Indeed, there is no “essence” to Latin American music. If anything, the bulk of regional music cultures falls within the impure, that is, the overlapping of multiple styles coming from different geographies and time frames.

Thus, following Marcus (1995), the relationship between music and place must tackle its “multi-sidedness”, and ethnography should be applied accordingly. However, despite his accuracy in addressing cultural production in the contemporary world due to multicultural encounters, Marcus’s idea of a multi-sited ethnography might suggest horizontal relationships between places, omitting the hierarchies and inequity that define globalisation. For that reason, Xiang (2013) describes globalisation as a somewhat “multi-scalar” process. That is a process in which the movement of people, goods, ideas, and technologies happens globally, or it could move on more minor scales, sometimes not even transcending the strictly local. For instance, in the worldwide distribution of popular music, it is clear that individual styles from a few geographies reach the global stage while the others remain local and restricted to particular locations.

Therefore, the approach I apply in this research considers the Ecuadorian independent music scene as the intersection of an intricate set of relations at three scales: a) the grassroots, on which national narratives, traditions, history, the national economic and political context play a significant role, b) the regional, which involves the culturally constructed notions and socio-political aspects of being part of Latin America; and c) the global, which mainly consists of the music industry, media, and technologies.

Xiang (2013: 295) additionally suggests understanding the multi-scalar not only as a structure that determines relations of powers – “the taxonomical” – but as a setting that opens up opportunities – “the emergent” –. In that way, the multiple scales described by Xiang embodied a tension, for they impose structures and create opportunities. In Xiang’s words:

Multi-scalar ethnography, with its emphasis on the intersection between emergent and taxonomical, provides us with a method to explain how the new is born out of the old, and how cracks within established systems can be widened to lead to changes. Multi-scalar ethnography certainly does not claim to be a supreme way of doing research. But it can be useful for those who see research as a means of critical engagement (Xiang, 2013: 296)

This multi-scalar approach is thus consequent with the peripheral, as it addresses translocality but does not omit relations of power and its disadvantages. Of course, these are realistic scenarios for most alternative music cultures anywhere globally; however, for obvious reasons, they tend to be much more extreme in small Global South countries like Ecuador that remain peripheral even in the regional context. These disadvantages result from structural conditions and not from the scene’s everyday interactions and meaning-making practices. In that sense, they are not entirely approachable through a classical sense of ethnography (Heyman, 2013:88). Assuming that, on its origins, ethnography was conceived to avoid the limitations of the purely theoretical, the current conditions of the world force ethnography to find theoretical perspectives that compensate its limitations to cover its blindspots. As Cohen (2010: 133) argues, “[e]thnography is meaningless in the absence of theory”.

On the limits of ethnography

The music industry establishes conditions and legal frameworks for the global distribution of music. As Frith (1989:2) asserts, “all countries’ popular musics are shaped by international influences and institutions, by multinational capital and technology, by global pop norms and values”. No matter how grassroots a scene or a music culture is, it is still at some level conditioned by global music distribution’s corporate interests. However, the macrostructural nature of the industries is a blind spot for the localised logic of ethnography. An ethnographic approximation to music cultures in the XXI, thus, covers its limitations with a perspective that critically examines the macro structural level and how it affects cultural practices. That theoretical perspective is the political economy which Negus (1999: 15) argues,

[...]has provided many insights into the various ways that corporate ownership impinges upon cultural practices, highlighting how production occurs within a series of unequal power relations, how commercial pressures can limit the circulation of unorthodox or oppositional ideas and how the control of production by a few corporations can contribute to broader social divisions and inequalities of information, not only within nations but across the world.

A critical theoretical perspective, thus, becomes a useful complement for ethnography, for it tackles the structures that restrict but do not fully determine the conditions in which the everyday experience of music happens. For instance, from the 1960s, Latin America slowly became a niche market for the global industry (Negus, 1999: 135; Shaw & Dennison, 2005). This partial inclusion, in many ways, shifted the musical landscape in the region for good and for bad. It contributed to generating a sense of regional community through music prompting regional styles like salsa and lately reggaeton. Likewise, it encouraged the contact between local traditions and international music genres generating new hybrid aesthetics in the Latin Alternative rock scene of the 1990s. Nonetheless, following their corporate pursuits, big labels have tended to promote a simplified version of the region's vast diversity by packing Latin music cultures in categories such as "tropical" and, more recently, "Latin Urban" (Negus, 1999 and Rivera-Rideau & Torres-Leschink, 2019). Such categories thus encompass a significantly reduced sample of the region's sounds.

In that regard, it is essential to point out that the global industry marginalises most domestic music cultures from smaller peripheral contexts like Ecuador, forcing them to use informal and alternative means of distribution. This marginalisation, of course, justifies the ethnographic emphasis of this research. Still, as I show in chapters 7 & 8, it does not imply that the industry does not indirectly affect the scene.

As mentioned, the corporate impulse behind the global circulation of music produces restrictive conditions for the periphery, but this does not mean there is no room for agency. Indeed, critically approaching global corporate structures is helpful to uncover the power relations that condition the musical landscape. Still, it may present a deterministic perspective of how power structures operate across cultures (van Djick, 2013: 25). As a methodological and theoretical strategy, the combination of ethnography with critical theory perspectives serves to look at a fuller picture in non-deterministic and biased ways. Furthermore, combining the micro-scale of ethnography with the macro perspective of critical perspectives over global cultural industries tackles structure and agency as a tension that generates multiple outcomes.

The relationship of many countries with the record industry is hardly equal. Some countries are more important music markets than others. Likewise, the inclusion of native acts in each country's repertoire tends to notably vary even in countries from the same region (Martel, 2011). For instance, Brazil has traditionally been one of the region's biggest markets and has maintained a balanced catalogue of domestic and international music acts. In contrast, during the 2000s Central America and Ecuador averaged 97% of international repertoire distributed locally through the global music industry (Bernstein et al., 2006: 86). This data demonstrates that specific locations are mainly consumers rather than music producers – at least in what respects to music promoted by the industry.

Technology and media are other popular music dimensions that fuel the tension between grassroots agency and structural forces. The emergence of the internet directly impacted the music industry's strategies to maintain control over the global market of music distribution. The end of the 1990s seemed to be the beginning of a more democratic future. Several scholars argued that emerging digital technologies would erase the boundaries between producers and consumers, democratising access to information (Castells, 1998; Lessing, 2004; Jenkins; 2006). However, the increasing corporatisation in recent years evident in the growing use of subscription-based platforms and social media has turned this optimism into suspicion (Umoja Nobel, 2018).

Accordingly, in chapter 7, I explore how digital technologies for music distribution enable transformations, opportunities, and limitations for local artists, audiences, and the global industry. Furthermore, I examine the everyday experience of independent music production and consumption concerning technology and tackle how the industry exercises control over distribution methods through new technologies. And in chapter 8, as an auto-ethnographic strategy, I reflect on my experience producing alternative media content to communicate further and document local independent music. The purpose of this is to address the possibilities that the strategic use of digital media could have for the empowerment of local independent music.

Conclusions and a reflection on ethics

This chapter aimed to define a strategy for studying the mobile condition of music in the contemporary world. As this is a thesis about a specific scene, a scene in a peripheral location, ethnography's place-based agenda became a coherent strategy. Nonetheless, globalisation has

generated conditions that fragment the experience of time and place. Rethinking ethnography to such needs becomes imperative. This process requires thinking of time as a continuum of past-present-future. Likewise, of place, not as a fixed condition, but as a location redefined by the overlaps of multiple sites on multiple spatial scales: the grassroots, the regional, and the global. This multi-temporal multi-scalar approach to an ethnography requires tackling the specific everyday of the Ecuadorian independent music scene on its relationship to structural conditions that condition how widespread music distribution happens on a global scale. For that purpose, ethnography is complemented adequately with critical perspectives to understand the political economy of the global music industry, media and technologies. In general terms, all of the following chapters apply the strategies described in some way or another. Nonetheless, each brings its specific discussions, methods, and theories.

Before closing this chapter, it is worth reflecting on the political character of this research. In this and the previous chapter, I designed a theoretical and methodological approach that follows a postcolonial/decolonial critique. I should point out that, from my perspective as a researcher, this critiques, at the same time, a theoretical framework and a political conviction but not a political goal. As I argue throughout this thesis, this independent music culture has demonstrated the tenacity to challenge the status quo and deconstruct colonial logic that permeates Ecuadorian society and culture. However, challenging the powers that be is not the objective of this research. Its purpose is to expand the knowledge on this peripheral music culture by translating its most significant meanings.

That said, not all of what defines this scene is necessarily a critique. Of course, there are contradictions, countless shades, and other characteristics. Yet, the critical aspects of this scene are what I argue make up the most distinctive as they link the idea of independent music to the definitive aspects of Ecuadorian culture. These critical aspects are, in other words, the site-specific aspects of Ecuadorian independent music. Hence, the following chapters do not pretend to be read as an encyclopaedic knowledge of Ecuadorian independent music cultures. They are a study of their critical potentialities and a critique of the structures that marginalise them.

Moreover, being an insider requires taking some ethical considerations. Being a media producer studying from within this scene is a huge advantage in getting informed consent and access to the different spaces in which this music culture happens. Getting interviews, for instance, has

been fairly easy as many artists already associate me with Radio COCOA¹⁸. Music is supposed to be a performative act, so artists are usually willing to share their thoughts and ideas, especially if you have the capacity to amplify them. Indeed, when amplifying this music culture, I believe my media practice and academic interests converge. I elaborate extensively on that in chapter 8, but for the purposes of this chapter, I must assert that this thesis is part of a broader process that sees beyond the mere production of academic knowledge. The aim is to argue in favour of the value of this music culture and to use this knowledge to find solutions to the adverse conditions it faces. In other words, it is my interest that some of the findings I present here serve as a well-argued basis to start thinking of Ecuadorian independent music as cultural heritage on the making and designing strategies and policies to support it.

¹⁸ I have conducted many interviews in which I ask for consent not only for an article or documentary but also for this thesis's specific purposes.

Chapter 3

Rock and Resistance: the foundational stone of Ecuadorian independent music

Rock music, which arrived in the late 1960s in Ecuador, marked the beginning of independent music cultures in the country, and it remains the main independent music culture. In this chapter, my aim is not to elaborate on a detailed historical recount of the emergence of rock in Ecuador. The history of Ecuadorian rock is vastly complex, and there are a lot more names and episodes that deserve recognition if the aim was to tell that history.¹⁹ Instead, this chapter seeks to reflect on Ecuadorian independent music's critical and countercultural ethos. More than chronologically going through the bands, producers, and events that have made up the scene over time, I reflect on emblematic moments and actors that, in many ways, speak of rock and independent music as a resistance culture. I do not pretend to romanticise Ecuadorian rock as a heroic and pure critical expression against power. However, this chapter focuses on one of Ecuador's most significant and relevant sociological and cultural facets of rock music culture: a middle finger to the face of power.

Over the last two decades, the criminalisation of rock music in the region has partially dissipated in Latin America (Pacini Hernández, Fernández L'Hoeste & Zolov, 2004). Emerging alternative forms of music from the region now incorporate other styles, sounds, and attitudes beyond rock music and its derivatives. However, the rebelliousness, definitive in the early decades of rock, has permeated the newer independent scenes like the Ecuadorian. Ecuadorian independent music may have diversified its forms, but rebelliousness remains an essential component of the

¹⁹ Many moments in the history of rock in Ecuador have been documented in other publications such as books, zines, blogs, documentaries, and press articles. Pablo Rodríguez, whom I quote many times in this chapter, has done a prolific job in this regard. Also, it is worth mentioning the work of Orlando Mena, who told a very detailed history of Ecuadorian Rock in the early 2000s in his zine, *Atahualpa Rock*. In the last few years, Radio COCOA has been telling detailed stories of influential people and moments that have represented the rock scene over time.

more contemporary independent music cultures. Hence, the aim is to explain how rock became the foundational stone of Ecuadorian independent music.

Accordingly, this chapter argues that the independence of this scene goes beyond do-it-yourself practises. Rock ethos and its legacy have been the confrontation of established powers. Rock, initially seen as a cultural import, became a music culture that has fostered an alternative nationalistic perspective. That is nationalism that rages against political corruption, colonialism, and imperialism. Hence, through interviews with artists, close readings of lyrics, press articles, recollecting archives, and my own experiences as a fan, I reflect on the legacy of rock as an expression against social inequality, capitalism, and racism in Ecuador. However, before dealing with the specifics of Ecuadorian rock cultures, it is essential to understand how an imported music style from Anglophonic geographies enables subcultural movements throughout the region.

The Paradox of rock in Latin America

If the argument is that rock has acted as a critical form of expression across Latin America, the fact that rock first was an import from hegemonic anglophone geographies reveals a paradox. For Global South regions, many of which were colonised regions, globalisation has often implied a threat to their native cultures and, in that matter, the continuity of colonial processes due to the imperial logic of capitalism. Indeed, the rock phenomenon in the region raised concerns about local music traditions getting displaced by the increasing penetration of Anglo-American and Anglo-European popular music. However, the journey of rock in Latin America is far more complex. As Appadurai (2005:32) argues, globalisation and the cultural imperialism it implies are not a one-directional process with predetermined outcomes.

Rock has gone through multiple interpretations, adoptions, and adaptations in each location it has landed (Negus, 1999). The argument of rock as an alienating force –a narrative that suggests a lack of agency by local audiences of capitalism – did not sustain for long. Across the Latin region, rock scenes have kept emerging since the early 1960s and, in most cases, the story has been similar: rock went from representing a cultural import to then became a threat to the elites (Pacini Hernández, Fernández L’Hoeste & Zolov, 2004; Valdéz & Urióstegui, 2015: 203). Thus, Latin American music cultures have, for the most part, remained underground, operating outside of the scope of mainstream entertainment industries.

The more mainstream facets of Latin rock reached regional popularity due to the impulse of majors like BMG Ariola in the 1980s and MTV Latin America in the 1990s. However, the Latin rock that got the push to gain regional visibility is only the tip of the iceberg. Rock scenes throughout Latin America had existed in the underground and, on repeated occasions, have faced episodes of repression. The meanings and implications of Latin American rock are not necessarily entangled with industries and celebrity culture, as is often the case with its Anglophonic counterparts. As I assert forward, Ecuadorian rock has been closer to political activism than it has been to global cultural industries.

To prove that point, in 2020, Netflix launched the documentary series “Break It All: The History of Rock in Latin America”. As its name implies, the six episodes that made up the series aim at telling the history of rock music from the region. Nonetheless, shortly after it premiered, a torrent of harsh criticism was unleashed across the region. From mainstream to independent specialised, there was a general agreement that the series omitted more than it revealed²⁰. The relatively high-profile artist and producers portrayed in the documentary felt short in representing the complexity of Latin rock. Such critique also revealed that the cultural significance of rock music in the region is more about what has happened at the street level than what has come through the entertainment industries.

Moreover, the overall experience of Latin American rock music suggests that rather than displacing local cultures, rock has increasingly fused with regional traditions and aligned with the political and cultural agendas of young people (Pacini Hernández, D. Fernández, H. & Zolov, 2004; Cepeda, 2012; Viteri, 2011; Valdéz & Urióstegui, 2015: 215). The same could be said about other newer genres from Anglo-Saxon geographies like hip-hop and electronic. Yet, I elaborate on how such styles started integrating Ecuadorian independent music in chapter 6. However, as a starting point, I suggest that rock’s experience in the region proves that, as music moves around the world, it continuously enables multiple cultural encounters and hybrid configurations. Multifaceted collapses between the global popular culture these music styles represent and the localised cultures they encounter (Connell & Gibson, 2003).

²⁰ A fast Google search can confirm this was the case. Moreover, on social media, many fans and artists made similar comments.

Moreover, it is imperative to think of rock music in Latin America beyond binary definitions. Rock in Latin America is a complex hybrid configuration entangled with global and national traditions, avantgardism, consumption, and resistance. Indeed, music has inhabited a paradox beyond the Latin American experience. Reflecting on the political economy of music through different historical periods, Attali (2009) encounters a paradoxical nature in music. The author suggests that music has reproduced society's established norms; however, it has also announced and pushed changes. Accordingly, Latin American rock has been a phenomenon that could not have happened without the agency of global media corporations and the music industry. Still, it also acts as a grassroots countercultural music culture.

"We are South American Rockers", a song by the Chilean band Los Proisioneros illustrates the paradoxical nature of Latin rock very well. The song, which premiered in 1987 during the last years of a military dictatorship, celebrates the irony of rock questioning the system while being a marketable product. Many lines of its lyrics brightly tackle these contradictions:

These are beautiful sounds that come from
the shopping stores
It is like rock 'n roll, just junk, barely
transformed to sound just the same...
It is not embarrassing for us to mix styles
As long as they smell like gringo and make
you dance
We are South American Rockers, nou
sommel rockers sudamerican. [this line,
which is the chorus is originally sang in
English and French

*Son hermosos ruidos que salen de las
tiendas
Es como el rock'n roll, pura música basura,
un poco transformada para que suene
igual...
No nos acompleja revolver los estilos
Mientras huelan a gringo y se puedan bailar
We are South American Rockers, nou
sommel rockers sudamerican.*

But what about the specifics of Ecuadorian rock? The following sections explore how rock emerged in the country and became a counter-culture that founded Ecuadorian independent music.

Rock and the origins of the independent Ecuadorian scene

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the early pioneers of rock music in Ecuador faced ambivalent responses. As mentioned, on the one hand, the emerging rock culture represented a potential degeneration of society's "good values". On the other, militant leftist groups saw in these cultures just another expression of cultural alienation promoted by Anglo hegemonic machinery that attempted erasing local traditions (Gonzalez Guzman, 2004, Ayala Román, 2008; Viteri, 2011; Rodríguez, 2019). This odd reaction has been well documented in the few books, articles, and blogs that tackle the history of Ecuadorian rock. I further confirmed this during the *1er Seminario de Estudios de Rock Ecuador* [First Seminary of Rock Studies in Ecuador] with gathered scholars, journalists, cultural promoters, and artists who lived, studied, or produced content on the rock scene. Many of the speakers who referred to the rock history in Ecuador told a similar origin story.

For the rest of the region, the story was pretty similar. The arrival of rock in many countries initially faced the rejection of both progressives and conservatives²¹. In *Mapping Rock Music Cultures across the Americas*, Pancini Hernandez, Fenandez and Zolov (2004) address how rock cultures were subject to criminalisation from the 1960s to the 1980s in countries like Puerto Rico and Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Argentina and Brazil. Either left or right-leaning dictatorships repressed rock cultures. Latin American governments were divided between those who embraced a more liberal model and those seeking a new political order rejecting imperialism and achieving further autonomy. Therefore, it is understandable that rock music, which mainly came from the US and the UK, was seen as an expansion of imperialism and consequent cultural alienation. Likewise, it is worth considering that the Ecuadorian and most Latin American societies of that time presented a significant number of rural and profoundly catholic populations. Thus, anything new, strange and rebellious was intimidating for most of the population and equally threatening for the authoritarian ethos of the military regimes. These were enough reasons to justify rock persecution, criminalisation and even the accusation of promoting satanism, drug consumption and communism or capitalism (Chapter 8 further explores this matter).

²¹ It is also worth remarking that rock music has a multi-ethnic background. Not only did it include black and white music cultures, but it also had early representatives that were Latin migrants such as Richie Valens and Carlos Santana. However, as Pacini Hernandez (2010) asserts, this is an often-neglected facet of rock music history.

Nonetheless, in most Latin countries repression turned into acceptance by the 1990s (Pacini Hernández, D. Fenández, H. & Zolov, 2004). This shift was more evident in countries like Argentina and Mexico, which arguably have had the most thriving and influential rock scenes. In Ecuador, this acceptance has happened at a slower pace. The fact that the country returned to a democratic political system in 1979 did not necessarily translate into a less hostile environment for freedom of speech. Some of the most emblematic repressive events against the local rock culture happened in the 1980s and 1990s. To a large extent, this explains why Ecuadorian rock has not made a regional impact and has remained as an obscure and very localised music scene. In other words, this lack of influence is not a sign of an absence of movement but, as I show next, of a repressive context.

The first decade of rock in Ecuador

In the 1960s and 1970s, early rock 'n' roll danceable music from artists like Elvis, Bill Haley, and Chuck Berry became discreetly popular and played in parties and clubs. However, later versions of the genre, which were more aggressive and politically explicit, were, for the most part, ignored by local radios and television stations. An early pioneer of Ecuadorian rock in the late 1960s, and the first band that managed to record original rock 'n' roll compositions, was Los Hippies. As a psychedelic rock band influenced by The Beatles and Led Zeppelin, their first original and Ecuadorian rock song ever recorded was "*protesta contra el mundo*" [protest against the world]. As its name insinuates, the song denounced social injustice that provoked hunger in the country and the world and promoted peace among nations. As expected, these sorts of countercultural claims were not greeted by the military dictatorship ruling the country at the time.

Rock gigs started as clandestine events, hidden from the authorities and the general population. Early posters could not even put the word "rock" on the promotional flyers. Allegedly, the police showed up to cancel these events when they did. So they strategically used words like "*peña bailable*" [dancing party] or "*fogata bailable*" [bonfire] as a way to hide the events from authorities (Viteri, 2018) (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Early Ecuadorian rock flyer. The image of this flyer belongs to Juan Vásconez Carrasco, a local fan and collector of all kinds of objects that tell the story of the history of rock in Ecuador. Over the years, he has collected more than 10.000 concert flyers. I asked him to select the 12 flyers that, in his opinion, tell the history of rock in Ecuador, which is the first one he picked.

At the time, repression towards rock was not as harsh in other countries like Argentina, where radios and television stations were far more receptive to rock music since the late 1950s and eventually started playing recordings of local emerging bands and artists (Cepeda 2012:5). As part of public nationalistic projects, local music, whether traditional, folk, or high-art music, was encouraged and supported by public institutions and media outlets (Ibíd.: 6). In part, this openness explains why Argentinian rock culture thrived even resisting periods of military dictatorship. In the Ecuadorian case, censorship was definitive. From 1963 to 1966 and again from 1972 to 1979, military dictator regimes ruled the country, the reinstatement of democracy entering the 1980s did not translate into a less hostile environment. In many ways, this speaks

of a conservative culture. However, even if rock in Ecuador did not become a massive phenomenon, exceptional characters willing to go against the tide pushed Ecuadorian rock.

Pancho Jaime “*la mamá del rock*”

One of the most emblematic figures of those early days was Pancho Jaime, also known as “*la mamá del rock*” [rock’s mom]. Pancho Jaime’s history has been well documented by fans, music journalists and in the work of local anthropologist Xavier Andrade (1999, 2008). The rock community widely recognises his relevance as one of the main precursors of rock in Ecuador. Curiously, although he had a band called “Texaco Wolf”, Pancho Jaime was mainly known for his work as a concert producer, radio DJ, music journalist, and political cartoonist. Texaco Wolf did not make any recordings and only played a couple of live shows. The only evidence of its existence are testimonies from people who went to some of the band’s shows and a couple of pictures. However, Pancho Jaime’s name has become synonymous with the origins of rock in Ecuador as he is responsible for giving birth to the scene from his city, Guayaquil.

The history of Pancho and the emergence of rock in Ecuador goes back to the mid-1970s. After living in the United States for some years, he returned to the country with one mission: to make rock music happen in Ecuador²² (Andrade, 2008). However, after putting up events, making radio shows, and the first documented rock zine, Rock On, Pancho evolved into an anti-establishment political figure. Throughout the 1980s, Rock On transitioned from a rock zine to a tabloid filled with pornographic cartoons that aim to discredit local politicians. This publication which he then named Censura [censorship] and finally Comentarios de Pancho Jaime [Pancho Jaime’s commentaries], contained cartoons showing nudity that make fun of the sexuality of politicians insinuate their lack of masculinity, homosexuality, and stupidity (Ibid.). Of course, the language was not the most articulate; spelling and grammar errors were abundant as well as dirty language and slang. Pancho was not trying to make a sophisticated critique of the political class; he directly attacked it with working-class rhetoric.

²². In 2016, I asked Xavier Andrade to let me collect all of the information he had gathered overtime on Pancho’s life to write an article for Noisey Latin America.



Figure 2. Pancho Jaime's poster. The poster is a satire of a criminal "most wanted" flyer that aimed to protest against the persecution of Pancho. The text says, "Wanted, Pancho Jaime, Manager of Censura, for telling the truth. Hand him dead or alive to Jorge Arosemena G. or Carlos Castro T. In the Ministry building of Guayas [province]". It was released a couple of months before Pancho got killed.

As Pancho Jaime increasingly committed to direct attacks on politicians in the most politically incorrect way possible, he never stopped producing rock shows and supporting local bands. He still frequented rock gigs and even used these events to distribute his publications (Andrade, 1999). Pancho's efforts to discredit the power were so effective that he became a threat to the government. He was often captured and harassed by the military and the police. One of the most infamous episodes was when in 1984, after getting arrested, police cut his hair and forced

him to eat one of the issues of his publications. Local newspapers and news shows showed a picture of his face with an issue of *Censura* on his mouth (Figure 3). That only motivated Pancho to keep producing his publications until 1989, when he ended up being killed on the streets of Guayaquil in an unsolved event that has remained in impunity (Andrade, 2008; Viteri, 2016).

Pancho's attacks to power and his assassination cemented the anti-establishment spirit of Ecuadorian rock. He is one of the main reasons rock became a symbol of resistance in the country, despite its lack of popularity. His life proved that the status-quo rejection of rock cultures was not incorrect. Rock music was a threat to power.



Figure 3. A *Censura* issue where Pancho denounces his capture and the attacks inflicted on him. He also mentions that they would have killed him if it was not for Radio Cristal and Radio Atalaya having denounced him being kidnapped.



Figure 4. Pancho Jaime's last publication cover. The one that allegedly "cost him his life", as the text in red and blue mentions. The picture is Pancho wearing the presidential band while he thinks, "fuck being the president". At the bottom, two local news magazines cover former president León Febres Cordero and his successor Rodrigo Borja.

Ecuadorian Rock as activism

Pancho Jaime was a unique figure, and most of his work centred in his city of Guayaquil, the country's second-biggest city. Yet, by the 1980s, Quito, the country's capital, arguably became the epicentre of Ecuadorian rock. One of its early emblematic figures is folk and rock singer Jaime Guevara, who entered the scene in the mid-1970s. Like Pancho Jaime, Jaime Guevara is recognised for his rock movement involvement and anti-establishment ethos. Early in his career, Guevara's repertoire was a mixture of his compositions inspired by *nueva canción* folk singers like Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara, and covers of bands like Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, and The Who. These influences made up for an unusual combination, considering that in those days, *nueva canción* was a reaction to everything that came from the Anglo-Saxon geographies.

Jaime Guevara

In an interview published by Rodríguez (2019:p 261-293), Guevara mentioned how hard it was to get the basic tools to play music in the 1970s. The environment of those days was highly precarious for aspiring rockers for many factors. Those who wanted to start a band, especially working-class kids, were forced to find creative ways to get musical instruments and amplification systems for rehearsing and gigs. For instance, sometimes they would borrow equipment from churches and high schools, which I have heard many times in interviews with other local rock pioneers. Additionally, because of religious morals, Guevara mentions in the same interview that 1970s Anglo-American and British rock music generated fear among the majority of the local population.

As mentioned, despite being a decade in which the country went back to a democratic system, the 1980s were very repressive years for intellectuals, artists, and students. Consequently, Guevara got involved in political activism and assumed a more aggressive attitude towards power. As expected, repression against young people identified with rock increased too. So Guevara became a visible face in the protests against authoritarian use of force and the disappearance of young people during the government of the right-wing president, León Febres Cordero. For these reasons, and even to this day, Guevara is a recurrent character in rock

events, demonstrations, and street protests in which he still shows up carrying his acoustic guitar.

Mayra Benalcazar, an activist and one of the key radio hosts for the local independent scene, argues that by the early 1990s, the rock community was close to political activism (Bayas & Viteri, 2020). It was usual for the rock community to meet at demonstrations. One of the main spots was Plaza Grande, a plaza in front of the presidential palace where protesters denounced people's disappearances. Benalcazar assures that some of the influential rock artists like Perros Callejeros, Hugo Hidrovo, and, of course, Guevera, and some of the emerging bands like Sal y Mileto would often meet in these demonstrations. In the 1990s, Ecuadorian rock was far from consolidating a thriving industry, but it certainly embraced a militant agenda. One of the most iconic elements was long hair in men.

Long Hair and repression in the 1990s

The use of long hair on men was one of the most characteristic elements of rock fans worldwide. However, in some Latin countries, long hair was targeted as an irreverent form of expression, profiled as criminal and deviant by the local authorities (Cepeda, 2012:36). The characteristic look of a rocker: black clothes, jeans, piercings, and the use of long hair in men, more than an imported fad, became a sort of provocation to the authorities and, therefore, a political statement (Gallegos Pérez, 2004). For over two decades, it became a common practice among police officers to detain, humiliate, and cut the hair of local *rockeros*. That happened to Pancho Jaime, Jaime Guevara, and on countless occasions to rock fans during the 1980s and 1990s.

While rock music was thriving in most of the region, Ecuadorian rock was known for the repression it faced. One of the most remembered episodes of repressive attitude against rock happened in 1996 in the small town of Ambato. During a concert of the Mexican band Cenotaph, the police forced its entrance into the event and captured many assistants. After harassing and insulting the detained rockers, the police cut their hair. The event made television news and local papers, and it also appeared on the news segment of MTV Latino América. Interestingly the network, which rarely played videos from Ecuadorian rock bands, reported this event.

Just before this unfortunate event, the just elected president, populist Abdalá Bucaram, expressed to the media his rejection of rock music for considering it an imported culture that was "corrupting the minds of young people". This attack is deeply rooted in the memory of the rock movement of the country —some of the few books, press articles, blogs, and even documentaries on the rock scene covered and reflected on the event.

In the following years, repression against rock fans decreased but never wholly dissipated. The harshness of the 1996 event contributed to breaking some of the stigmas around rock. Nevertheless, the local rock scene struggled to change its lousy reputation. Indeed, rock fans arranged demonstrations to defend their legitimate right to express themselves through music. They started calling themselves “ *movimiento rockero*” [rock movement] (Guzmán, 2004). This joint effort contributed to attenuate the harassment and to gain spaces and legitimise further the creation of festivals and concerts in public spaces such as El Festival de la Concha acústica²³, La Semana del Rock²⁴, and in the 2000s, Quitofest²⁵, to mention a few.

Nonetheless, the repercussions of this initial hostility and aggression towards *rockeros* may not be manifesting so directly, but it still generates adverse conditions for making independent music events. To this day, getting permission to do public and private independent music shows is, as many producers have often told me, “a pain in the ass”. Moreover, there is still tension between fans and the police in live rock events, which sometimes confront audiences and police officers.

Still a middle finger to the face of power

In 2013, Jaime Guevara had a harsh and widely covered altercation with the then left-wing president, Rafael Correa. Guevara argued that while he was walking back home, the caravan of

²³ This festival actually started in 1987, and it was the first public space conquered by the local rock culture, which started getting public funding for its organisation. It is perhaps the most traditional public rock festival of Ecuador and is produced by the rock organisation, Al Sur del Cielo.

²⁴ La Semana del Rock is a festival that started to celebrate rock culture and reject the harassment the rock culture was subject to in 1996. Certainly a step forward towards rock's legitimization.

²⁵ Quitofest was the biggest independent music festival produced in Ecuador. It was perhaps the first that presented international acts alongside local ones. It took place in public spaces and was supported by public funding. However, the political and economic instability of the country and the inconsistent support of public institutions killed the festival.

cars driving the president passed him by. As this happened, he remembered that, just recently, he was harassed by the police in a peaceful protest against oil extraction in the rainforest. After having spotted the caravan, the artist decided to “signal his finger towards the sky” — a rhetorical expression for showing the middle finger (Rodríguez, 2019:270). After this, the caravan of cars suddenly stopped; the president got out, walked towards Jaime, grabbed him by the shirt, insulted him by calling him "*borracho marihuano*" ["drunk pothead"], and ordered his arrest. Jaime was captured and then released a couple of hours later. The following week, on national television, President Correa gave his version of the event and accused Jaime of having provoked and disrespected him. When he got on Jaime's face, Correa argued that he perceived a strong smell of alcohol and assumed that the musician was probably high. Guevara, however, is a vegan and teetotal. The fact that the head of State justified his actions by evoking the stigma constructed around rock culture common in earlier decades was revealing.

Motivated by this episode, when Rafael Correa finished his term in office, Jaime decided to say goodbye to him with the song "*El Yucazo del adiós*" [*a middle finger to say goodbye*]. The song's video starts with the actual recording of Correa's version of the event, and subsequently, the musician accuses the former president of being an authoritarian macho. By the end of it, Guevara shows his middle finger to the former president as his way to say goodbye to him (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Jaime giving the finger to former president Correa in the video-clip of “*El Yucazo de adios*”

Ecuadorian rock has continuously demonstrated a critical attitude towards power throughout the decades. Nonetheless, confronting the authorities does not necessarily speak of how rock music in Ecuador became Ecuadorian. It is imperative to study how Latin American rock became Latin American to understand Ecuadorian rock.

Towards a Latin American rock

When looking back at the very first rock acts from all over the region, it is clear that they emulated what their Anglophonic counterparts were doing but singing in the Spanish language. During this early era, nationalists considered it an alienating cultural importation. For rock to become an authentic Latin expression, it had to achieve a further sense of authenticity based on its regional and national locality. In many ways, and as rock cultures across Latin America kept developing, they increasingly included elements from their respective national imaginaries (Pancini Hernandez, Fernández L’Hoeste & Zolov, 2004, L. 242)²⁶. Therefore, in the 1980s, the Latin region widely adopted rock as a music style capable of furthering a sense of regional identity. Ironically, if the aim is to understand rock as a regional phenomenon, the music industry and media corporations become key. Indeed, from the 1980s, they have been definitive in building the idea of Latin American rock. Two moments were decisive to achieve that sense of Latin rock: BMG Ariolas’s “*rock en tu idioma*” [rock in your language] campaign in the 1980s and the rise of the 1990s Latin alternative rock scene, which was pushed throughout the region by MTV Latin America.

Rock en tu idioma

Language has been a definitive aspect of Latin American versions of rock music. Many of the first Latin American rock acts from the 1960s and 1970s had names in English, while others

²⁶ Very often these elements were traditional indigenous and mestizo instruments and sounds, but I explore that further in the following chapters.

used to play covers from bands from anglophone countries²⁷. By the end of the 1970s, Latin rock evolved into a grassroots expression that spoke critically about the region's social and political struggles. Although still influenced by its Anglophone counterparts, Latino rock versions added a political imprint that reacted to its respective national context. For instance, the Argentinian rock scene of those days coined the term "*rock nacional*" [national rock]. This nationalistic approach was due to its growing popularity, which was rare in most of the region's countries. The scene produced legendary names for Latin Rock like Alberto Spinetta and Charly García. However, popularity did not necessarily facilitate things for Argentinian rock. The emerging culture often faced the repression of dictatorial governments (Valdéz & Urióstegui, 2015: 199). Yet, in the 1970s, Argentina became one of the most influential contexts for Latino rock.

In the following decades, one of the main contributing factors for establishing a sense of Latin American rock was, ironically, the global music industry. In the 1980s, BMG Ariola started distributing rock music to all the region (Valdéz & Urióstegui, 2015: 203). This industrialisation of Latin rock led to the slogan "*rock en tu idioma*" [rock in your language]. This slogan, however, eventually transcended the campaign and, in the early 1990s, became a way to refer to rock bands from the region and Spain. It is still used interchangeably with the phrase "*rock en español*" and evolved to define not only rock sung in Spanish but a period in Latin and Spanish rock from the 1980s to the early 2000s²⁸. Despite being a category established by the industry, *rock en tu idioma* played an essential role in embracing rock in Latin America (Días, 2010: 220). It demonstrated that beyond the implications of sharing a territory, the Spanish language was definitive in facilitating the creation of distribution circuits and a sense of shared identity across the region (Valdéz & Urióstegui, 2015: 204). Yet, language was only the first step towards achieving that local sense of identity.

²⁷ There are several examples from this period in almost all Latino countries. Some Examples are the Hot rockers in Cuba, the Teen Tops in Mexico, the Shakers in Uruguay, the Dangers in Venezuela, the Speakers in Colombia, Six Sided in Colombia, and many more (Días, 2010: 221).

²⁸ Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, some record stores used the category "*rock en español*" on their shelves. Similarly, a popular playlist of the streaming platform Spotify uses the category, which mostly includes Latin/o rock bands from the 1980s and 1990s.

The 1990s Latin American Alternative rock scene

With artists like Café Tacvba, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, Aterciopelados, Caifanes, Manu Chao, Molotov, Orishas, Maldita Vecindad, Gustavo Santaolalla, and Juana Molina, the 1990s saw the emergence of the Latin alternative rock scene. This generation of Latin artists came of age listening to rock, while being in touch with the diverse musical traditions of the region and their respective nations. Or, as the music journalist Ernesto Lechner asserted:

[this] was a time of tremendous growth and transformation for Latin rock [...] This moment was all about the blossoming of a new generation of bands who were turning Latin alternative into the decade's most exciting movement of the world. The young musicians, producers, and composers were not content anymore with simply emulating whatever musical format was trendy up North – protest songs in the sixties, prog-rock in the seventies, and new wave in the eighties. Sure, the sounds of rock punk, hip-hop, and electronica were present in their work, but there was also the refreshing appearance of a new element. These musicians had grown up listening to their parent's record collection of Latin American popular music: boleros, bossa nova, salsa, cumbias, and syrupy Latin pop (Lechner, 2006: x).

To a significant extent, this became a regional scene due to MTV Latino América, which started in 1993. Following a “think global act local strategy”, the network played alongside alternative rock bands like Nirvana, Pearl Jam and The Smashing Pumpkins, and Oasis, alternative Latin music (Martel, 2011: 302). The difference between the Euroamerican and the Latin artists, beyond language, was that the latter could fluidly move between rock, ska, metal, hip-hop, pop, reggae, cumbia, and a vast list of regional styles, cultures, and music instruments. Furthermore, the adoption of rock in the region increasingly leant towards a reconnection with the musical roots and idiosyncrasies, and the 1990s was the peak point of the scene.²⁹

²⁹ The legacy of this regional scene has kept resonating ever since the 1990s. Alternative Latin American music still maintains the same impetus, although it is not as popular as it was two decades ago. In the new millennium, artists like Mexican Natalia Lafourcade, Puerto Ricans Calle 13, and Uruguayan Jorge Drexler have kept the scene thriving, producing new Latin sounds inspired by the explorations of the region's traditions. In fact, later Latin acts might have deepened the exploration traditions. However, they have transcended rock and centred more on styles like pop, hip-hop, and electronic styles. For instance, in 2010, Calle 13's “*Latinoamérica*”, through thoughtful rap rhymes and a highly sophisticated ensemble of samples of Latin traditional instruments, expressed a collective desire for the Latin American union needed to resist capitalist and imperialist forces. Likewise, in her 2017 pop album *Musas* [muses], Lafourcade pays tribute and gets inspired by past Latin American folk women singers like Violeta Parra, Mercedes Sosa, and Chavela Vargas. And in the same year, Jorge Drexler's “*Movimiento*” [“movement”], claimed “*si quieres que algo se muera, déjalo quieto*” [if you wish that something dies, leave it sitting still]. A statement on human migration and the importance of keeping culture moving by reviving traditions and encounters across different cultures.

By the end of the 1990s, MTV Latin America shifted from focusing on Latin Alternative rock to a model closer to pop music and reality shows. However, for a big chunk of the 1990s, the network made Latin Alternative rock a mainstream phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that most emblematic artists aligned with this scene came from Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. The rock scenes from most Latin countries, especially the smaller ones like Ecuador, were barely represented. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, most Latin American rock was not on a screen; it was mainly an underground phenomenon. However, the brief mainstream status of *rock en tu idioma* and the Latin Alternative scene influenced smaller and more localised scenes like the Ecuadorian. Hence, in the next section, I explore how the Ecuadorian rock scene consolidated as Ecuadorian in the 1990s.

Towards an Ecuadorian Rock: nationalism and the deconstruction of the Nation

Despite not having achieved the visibility of other rock scenes from the region, in the 1990s, Ecuadorian rock started adding more elements that alluded to nationalistic and local cultures. This process happened while the scene was close to social protests. As mentioned, rock music's confrontation with the political class and its links to human rights and environmental activism became more straightforward in the 1990s. Its persecution by the government increased too. As I explore in further detail in chapter 8, rock was also not supported by the mainstream media, which reproduced stereotypes around the culture as deviant and Satanists. Besides contributing to justify the episodes of repression mentioned in the previous sections, this hostile environment prevented local rock from reaching more audiences.

Nonetheless, the scene resisted and kept expanding its counter-cultural attitudes from the underground. One of the main ways for doing so was through embracing both a regional identity and a more localised approach to rock. This section explores how Ecuadorian rock music became more Ecuadorian by incorporating regional and national imaginaries, discourses, and practices while expanding its counter-cultural value. But, before delving into how the rock scene increased its nationalism, I must first make a parenthesis to clarify the use of the term "nationalism" from a Latin American perspective.

Nationalism and music: a Latin American perspective

There is undoubtedly a tendency of thinking of nationalism as a conservative localism, nativism, and a reactionary position (Massey, 2012: 121). Yet, from the Global South and subaltern perspective of regions like Latin America, nationalism often has different and even opposed connotations. Many times, nationalism could also become a way of resisting the advance of cultural imperialism. As Eagleton (1990: 23) asserted,

“Nationalism,” remarks an African character in Raymond Williams's novel *Second Generation* (London, 1964), “is in this sense like class. To have it, and to feel it, is the only way to end it. If you fail to claim it, or give it up too soon, you will merely be cheated by other classes and other nations.” Nationalism, like class, would thus seem to involve an impossible irony.

In many Latin American countries, including Ecuador, different forms of music nationalism emerged in the early twentieth century (Wong, 2018:129). The aim of these forms of nationalism expressed through music, on its most basic connotation, was to promote a sense of belonging to the nation. Indeed, musical nationalism throughout the twentieth century in Latin America played disciplinary roles in “everyday politics, social reforms, and national identity”; however, music nationalism also became a way of fostering innovation and even criticism towards national leaders (Beezley 2018: 21).

In most of the Latin countries some form of musical nationalism emerged. Yet, most Latin American nationalisms share a mestizo narrative that embraced the region's indigenous and African musical roots by creatively mixing their sound and imagery with the European cultural roots. This musical mestizaje was, however, problematic. In its early stages, musical nationalism often created a romanticised and overly naive representation of an indigenous past which overlooked the present reality of the indigenous or African populations. However, other forms of nationalism expressed through art such as painting and literature evolved to denounce colonisation and abuse of indigenous peoples. It is pertinent to mention that most of the musical nationalism in Ecuador, at least its most popular forms, leaned towards romanticisation rather than social reality and political commentary (Wong, 2018:129).

Musical nationalism predates the arrival of rock in the region; nonetheless, it has significantly influenced how rock and other subsequent music cultures evolved in the region³⁰. However, for the 1970s Ecuador, the increasing penetration of international musical styles impacted the local consumption of national music (Wong, 2011: 89). As a result, Ecuadorian popular music diminished its capacity of creating a sense of belonging to the nation. As mentioned above, that happened in a context already hesitant to embrace the indigenous aspects of the culture. As the Ecuadorian intellectual Jorge Enrique Adoum repeatedly claimed in his work, Ecuadorians tend to feel ashamed of belonging to a small nation with indigenous roots ever ruled by corrupt, oppressive governments. However, unexpectedly, in the 1990s, Ecuadorian Rock music brought a sense of nationalism that questioned the political leaders and started incorporating traditional indigenous elements to embrace but question the Ecuadorian nation.

Indeed, by the end of the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, indigenous traditions started showing up constantly in the sound, the lyrics, posters and album covers, and live events – I explore this moment in further detail in chapter 5. But including traditional elements was a tendency that had its first expressions in the 1970s and 1980s. Predecessors of this movement were acts such as Amauta, Jaime Guevara, Tatural, and Promesas temporales. Still, the influence of the regional alternative rock scene of the 1990s contributed to popularise and sophisticate the local scene.

Prominent rock acts like Sobre Peso, Sal y Mileto, emerged during the decade, and coming from the more pop and less confrontational side, Cruks en Karnak and La Grupa. These bands have in common an experimental approach to rock that explored Ecuadorian traditions in multiple ways. Hence, by the end of the 1990s, what defined the Ecuadorian rock scene was its ability to perform an alternative nationalism that questioned the nation's official history and those in charge of it. This scene found ways to create an Ecuadorian rock sound from the underground while it challenged its powers and racist ethos. In the following section, I present a selection of three artists that started fostering a critical sense of nationalism that cemented Ecuadorian rock in the 1990s and beyond.

³⁰ Indeed, I further explore how musical nationalism and other Latin folk music cultures, interested in rural life and indigenusness that predate rock, eventually influenced all forms of independent music, starting with rock.

Sobrepeso: Blowing up the Nation and the ancestral calling

In 1997, Sobrepeso, a metal band that incorporated funk riffs influenced by Rage Against the Machine, launched *Ruleta*. The LP contained sixteen tracks that embrace Ecuadorian indigenous heritage, promote environmental ideas, and denounce State repression. Perhaps its most memorable song was “*Explotar*” [to blow up] — a song that evidences the connections of Ecuadorian rock with ongoing activist movements against the disappearances and tortures executed by repressive governments in the 1980s. Its chorus repeats the line “*yo voy a explorar, yo no sé en qué creer* [I’m about to blow up, I don’t know what to believe], clearly manifesting disbelief towards the official narrative of the nation and the ruling class that has remained in control of it. The whole concept of the album was a departure from the idea of a corrupt, racist nation that Adoum (2000) and other Ecuadorian intellectuals like Echeverría (2016) and Donoso Pareja (2000) questioned.

Another track that excels for incorporating indigenous elements fused with rock is the cover of the 1950 Ecuadorian song “*Vasija de Barro*” [Clay Vessel]. A flagship of traditional Ecuadorian music, “*Vasija de Barro*” was originally written in unconventional circumstances. Allegedly, its lyrics were collectively composed during a social gathering at the house of renowned indigenist Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamin (Paredes, 2019). Most of the attendees that day were elite intellectuals, artists, and poets, including Jorge Enrique Adoum, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Hugo Alemán, and singer-composers Gonzalo Benitez and Luis Alberto Valencia — best known as the duo Benitez y Valencia. Inspired by Guayasamin’s “*El Origen*” [the origin] — a painting that portrays a mother with a child in her clay vessel shaped belly – the group of intellectuals spontaneously started collectively writing a poem that in the same event was turned into a *danzante*³¹ song (Adoum, 2000:76). The painting alludes to burying the dead in clay vessels pre-colonial funeral practices. The colonisation of the territory eradicated this tradition and the groups that inhabited what is now Quito city.

Reflecting on why the song had become so emblematic of Ecuadorian music, Jorge Enrique Adoum (2000: 77) asserted that it responded to a collective nostalgic longing for a non-colonized being. Or, in other words, a desire to find a sense of belonging to a decent collective myth of origin. Indeed, I must admit that the song, which has been covered multiple times through the decades, is moving in a way that is hard to explain with words. The sad and

³¹ *Danzante* is a pre-Inca rhythm originally used to celebrate the rich corn harvests.

nostalgic vibe of its traditional *danzante* rhythm, singing on the verge of tears and the lyrics' poetry are extremely moving. Specifically, its first verse that reflects on an unfortunate weight of history and a romantic but fatalistic desire to return to dignity:

*Yo quiero que a mí me entierren
como a mis antepasados
en el vientre oscuro y fresco
de una vasija de barro*

[I want to be buried
like my ancestors
in the dark and cool belly
of a clay vessel]

Sobrepeso's 1999 song cover aimed to bring back the impulse of the group of intellectuals that started imagining a nation free of the weight of its colonial heritage, almost five decades earlier. However, the band did not make a faithful version of the traditional rhythm of the song. Sobrepeso fused it with a heavy metal incorporating an urban and modern component to tradition. Beyond style, the spirit of Sobrepeso's version was still true to the song's original spirit: resignifying our mestizo being as Ecuadorians. Indeed, the band's version added a line at the beginning of the track that expressed the relevance of its original message half a century after it was composed and half a millennium after the conquest: "this is a calling from our ancestors, of those who never left, of those who are waiting for us in our own blood" [*este es el silbido de nuestros ancestros, de los que nunca se fueron, de los que nos esperan en nuestra propia sangre*"].

Sobrepeso's heavy metal sound that explored traditional sounds and its contestatory lyrics encapsulated the spirit of the new Ecuadorian rock of the 1990s. Certainly, this aggressive approach proposed new sounds that incorporated global and local ideas. The message was clear; there is an urgent necessity to question the idea of the nation as they have taught us.

Sal y Mileto: *Rock Libre Ecuatoriano*

By the end of the 1990s, when Sobrepeso launched Ruleta, Sal y Mileto, a power trio from Quito was emerging. The band's sound – often charged with protest messages and influenced by poetry – was defined by its original members as "*Rock Libre Ecuatoriano*" [Free Ecuadorian Rock]. The band's sound was a fusion of progressive rock, metal, jazz, blues Ecuadorian music traditions. As in the case of Sobrepeso, Sal y Mileto was a band that took pride in being Ecuadorian, but this pride was also parallel to a rebel anti-establishment and critical attitude towards the country's official narratives.

Sal y Mileto was far from a conventional rock band. Paul Segovia and playwright Peko Andino started the band when they decided to bring together musicians, including drummer Igor Icaza. Even in its early days, the project fused rock with Ecuadorian music traditions. The band's second project, which established it as a referent of Ecuadorian rock, was the score of the influential theatre play *Kito kon K* written by Andino.

The play depicts an alternative version of the capital; a darker and more violent Quito, Kito³². In the play's city, a police investigation on the most significant mass murder committed in the country is happening. Ángel K, a neofascist young man, is the author of the massacre. K's nationalistic beliefs motivated him to clean the city from those who contaminated it (El Comercio, 2009). K's mother represents the motherland, and the education she provided to K seeded his fascist beliefs. Thus, as an alternative imaginary version of Quito, *Kito kon K* was a commentary on the racist and fascist ideas that permeated the Ecuadorian nation's history.

The concept of "*rock libre ecuatoriano*", which started with the play, embraced the cultural heritage of Ecuadorian culture. At the same time, it was critical of the Ecuadorian society and those who have controlled it. In its debut album, the band managed to create a unique sound: iconoclastic, hybrid, and political at the same time. Elements that, in many ways, defined the main characteristics of the Ecuadorian independent music of the new millennium. Indeed, Sal y Mileto's legacy is significant. The band has become one of the most influential rock bands of the scene as it represents a moment in which Ecuadorian rock clearly became Ecuadorian. Indeed, it is still relevant and active in the scene. Proof of its resilience was having survived the death of his charismatic lead singer and founder member, Paul Segovia³³.

Descomunal: rethinking the National Anthem in the 21st century

One of the most powerful experiences I have had as a fan of the rock scene happened in 2004 when I discovered Descomunal, a local metal and hardcore band from Quito. The first time I saw the band live, I got impressed by the power and aggressiveness of the music; however, one of the songs they played that day, "*Prevén tú la muerte*" ["foresee the death"] caught my

³² Interestingly, the original name of the territory that nowadays is the city of Quito, in traditional quechua language was "Kitu".

³³ Allegedly, it was Paul Segovia the responsible of including Ecuadorian traditional sounds in the rock ensemble of the band. Those close to him assert that he was more into *pasillos* (the most popular traditional Ecuadorian style) than he was on rock or metal (Segovia, 2014).

attention and intrigued me deeply. At first, I found the lyrics very familiar, but it took me a moment to realise that the band took some verses from the Ecuadorian national anthem. These verses, however, are not for singing. Using the obscure lyrics of the anthem to make a metal version of it was a provocative act, somehow nationalist but irreverent at the same time. The song subverts the conventional way of listening to the national anthem. Instead of standing still with the right hand on the chest, people start moshing to the anthem. Instead of being a moment of decorum and showing respect to a sacred national symbol, it enables a moment of catharsis and rebellion.

National anthems embrace the nation's ideology, and they are meant to create a sense of an imagined community (Connell and Gibson, 2003:127). Anthems aim to strengthen feelings of belonging, national identity, and pride among the people who share history and territory. Accordingly, the original version of the Ecuadorian national anthem epically reports how the country fought to gain independence and become Ecuador. By covering the Ecuadorian anthem instead of promoting a credible narrative of how the country gained independence, Descomunal invites us to question if that independence ever happened.

Indeed, "*Prevén tú la muerte*" picks only specific lyrics from the original anthem, intending to comment on the past and present of the Ecuadorian nation. The original Ecuadorian national anthem, written in 1884, comprises a chorus and six verses. Only the chorus and the second verse are part of the musical composition. The verses used in Descomunal's song are the first and sixth. The first verse narrates the epic battle that gained the country its independence from the colonial powers that ruled these territories. The sixth and last verse has a prophetic tone and announces the possibility of the emergence of new colonial forces regaining control of the nation and eventually causing its extinction. Indeed, in modern-day Ecuador, the prophecy revealed by verse six, the omitted verse, sounds like an accurate description of the country's present. "*Prevén Tú la Muerte*" suggests that the colonial order that once ruled the region never actually left. Colonialism, the cultural, political, and economic domination by powerful nations, never actually became a thing of the past. Descomunal, an Ecuadorian metal hardcore band, thus used an imported music style to turn the national anthem into a critique of the grand narrative of the nation and the alleged independence it proposes. The patriotic feelings that the anthem is supposed to inspire mean nothing today, as the nation's origin story is misleading. The country never gained its independence, colonialism is still a prevalent force, but the ruling

classes have systematically tried to hide it. This song is a perfect example of the impossible irony: a nationalism that destroys the fascist sense of nationalism.

Coda: on Ecuadorian rock's legacy

Rock music in Ecuador has never been about bands touring the world, playing stadiums, and selling millions of records. In Ecuador, the role of rock music is not about rock stars. Rock arrived in Ecuador and started the independent music scene. Despite its discrete impact, my argument in this chapter is that rock significance should be measured by how it has become a channel for younger generations to express themselves against injustice and raise their voice against repression. Of course, not all of the messages coming from the independent scene are -or have been- as directly confrontational towards power as the cases I presented in this chapter. However, those impacted, especially in the first three decades of independent music in the country, have been characterised by its irreverence and anti-status quo attitudes.

In this sense, the evolution of rock music in Ecuador has proven to represent far more than an "imported fad" from northern hegemonic countries. The cases I reflect on here confirm that rock adoption in the Ecuadorian context did not become an alienating force, but the opposite. Since the 1990s, rock has assumed an alternative sense of nationalism, becoming an authentic form of expression in the context of contemporary Ecuador. Indeed, for over four decades, Ecuadorian rock music has nurtured a critical attitude towards the orders that rule the world and the country.

In the new millennium, however, Ecuadorian rock went through constant changes. Its sounds have become increasingly more eclectic. The independence it founded now includes other styles beyond rock. Yet, it would be a mistake to affirm that rock's critical attitude has vanished in Ecuadorian independent music. If anything, rock has entered a process of transformation and diversification. Rock was not supposed to become a traditionalist genre. It never was about formulas and following the rules. As the messages and ideas from the independent scene become more diverse, it would be a fair point that rock is the foundational stone of the independent Ecuadorian scene. Moreover, rock has demonstrated that music could become a device to question power, and when the situation demands it, rock subversiveness is still there.

In October 2019, Ecuador went through a deep political crisis that started when the government announced a set of unpopular measures to confront a potential economic recession. Part of these measures attempted to eliminate fuel subsidies and pass labour flexibility laws. In response, indigenous political movements arranged massive protests supported by students, workers, and other populations. As the repression towards the protesters turned more aggressive, the Ecuadorian government justified its actions arguing that the demonstrations were organised by violent terrorists and left-wing organisations (Solano, 2019). In this context, Sal y Mileto re-edited their song "*aguanta*" ["keep up"]. This song was written almost 20 years before as a visceral response to one of the worst economic recessions the country has ever faced. Its lyrics rage against the imperialism imposed by wealthy northern countries, the corruption of our political class, and systemic racism. Its pertinence, two decades later, demonstrates that the cultural transcendence of Ecuadorian rock lies in how it turns music into defiance to the established order (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Frames are from the 2019 video clip of "*Aguanta*". On the top left, a graffiti of the song chorus "put up with what? Mother fucker". Next to it is a demonstrator holding a sign with the text "resist, people, resist!". On the bottom right, a group of indigenous demonstrators expressed demands aloud in front of a police cordon. And next to it, there is an image of Sal y Mileto playing in front of a huge pit.

All of the above is a reminder of the intricacies of globalisation. Music is a highly complex form of cultural expression. The outcomes can be unexpected when a music culture travels to different geographies and is adopted in new locations. As Appadurai (1996: 42) claimed, globalisation is a complex and paradoxical process in which homogenising forces get heterogeneous responses. Even though capitalism and prevalent colonial relationships push a colonial agenda, globalisation has not eliminated people's capacity to question power and resist.

Yet, as a cultural phenomenon that moved from north to south, there should probably be a concern about whether cultural imports such as rock contribute to displaced or erased native kinds of popular music. After all, globalisation could often be a process in which the culture from hegemonic countries imposes over the tradition of small ones (Beck, 2000). However, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, in Latin America and Ecuador, rock music has not erased regional music traditions. If anything, rock has motivated new generations to rediscover and explore the region's grassroots sounds. Emblematic figures of the local rock scene mentioned in this chapter, such as Jaime Guevara and Paul Segovia, were as much influenced by Latin American and Ecuadorian music as they were by anglophone forms of music.

“My dad is Dylan and my mom is Violeta Parra³⁴” [*mi taita es Dylan, mi mama es Violeta Parra*] Jaime Guevara recently mentioned in an interview (Rodríguez, 2019: 261). In the same text, Guevara also asserted that rock's initial rejection by the general population has similarities with the idiosyncratic dismissal of the country's indigenous heritage. For instance, the permanence of long hair in rockers has been as much an identity element taken from anglophone rock cultures as it has been an element borrowed from Andean indigenous cultures (Ibíd.: 265). Thus, it is not illogical to think that the rejection of the authorities to the long hair in rockers might have not only come from a conservative perspective – the repulsion to a traditional feminine element in males – but also for racist motivations. Colonial relationships are still present and palpable in modern-day Ecuador. The historical status quo of the country has not been only determined by class but also by notions of racial superiority inherited from colonial history.

Even though it may come across as a contradiction, tradition has become a significant component of contemporary Latin American cultural expressions. Thus, in the following three

³⁴ Violeta Parra was a Chilean singer and poet part of the *folklorista* movement, a group of Latin American artists mainly from Chile and Argentina dedicated to rescuing rural and indigenous music traditions.

chapters, I focus on how independent music in Ecuador – a scene that results from the influence of global music styles – has been increasingly motivated to explore and approach past music traditions as a decolonising strategy. Specifically, in the next chapter, I focus on studying regional and Ecuadorian music cultures that aimed at “reviving” indigenous mestizo traditions before rock's arrival. Altogether, the aim is to show how rock's counter-cultural ethos and a tradition of re-engaging with the rural, indigenous, mestizo, and black cultures explain the cultural relevance of contemporary independent Ecuadorian music.

Chapter 4

Nationalisms, *nueva canción* and the prevalence of traditional music cultures in Ecuadorian independent music.

In the previous chapter, I explored how, starting in the late 1960s in Latin America, rock became a counterculture. For the 1990s, elements from local indigenous, black, and mestizo traditions added to rock's countercultural ethos. Since then, it has been clear that one of the most significant features of the region's rock music has been its ability to fuse global styles with the vast diversity of the region's music traditions. However, exploring the musical roots was not something that rock and newer alternative music brought. Starting in the 19th century and throughout the 20th century in most Latin countries, numerous traditions explored pre-colonial music cultures. Hence, traditions have been a crucial component of Latin American and Ecuadorian music cultures.

This chapter explores significant music cultures that incorporated traditions before the emergence of Latin rock. In this sense, I aim to present a prequel of what traditional roots meant for the region and Ecuador before the emergence of independent music cultures. This delve into the past will provide further context to understand what has been tackled in the previous and what will be addressed in the following chapters. As Den Tend and Young (2004: 236) asserted following Cuban musicologist Alejo Carpentier,

Latin American music is a phenomenon like an explosion whose history and evolution, unlike the history of European music, cannot be traced in a linear or coherent pattern [...] Latin American music arises from nowhere as a series of accidents, unplanned events and startling surprises.

As argued, a consistent component of Latin American music cultures has been its *mestizaje* and consequent attachment with the region's musical roots. Starting in the late 19th century, in many Latin nations, formally exploring pre-colonial traditions was aligned with an attempt to reflect emerging mestizo cultures (Beezly, 2018). These explorations aim at fostering an authentic national culture different from the European ones that previously ruled these territories.

Moreover, these exploration and adoption of indigenous and black music cultures also followed countercultural paths that opposed the colonial logic that permeated the modernisation of the region.

For instance, in the 1950s, *nueva canción* was a regional popular music movement that promoted class consciousness and the rescue of indigenous and rural cultures to resist the expansion of global capitalism. At first, rock and *nueva canción* were assumed by many as opposite and incompatible music styles. *Nueva canción* represented the region's resistance against global powers, while rock, for many, represented a cultural import from these hegemonic nations. However, this chapter argues that the ideological impulse of *nueva canción* was eventually transferred to rock and subsequent independent forms of music.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the influence and connections between *nueva canción* and alternative and independent regional styles. It explains the socio-political context in which *nueva canción* came to be, what it represented, and how it impacted Ecuador. From there, it explores the trajectory of Amauta, an obscure Ecuadorian band from the 1970s that pioneered mixing the exploration of tradition, *nueva canción* with rock, jazz, and classical music. My argument here is that Amauta established the beginning of the fusion between the ideas of *nueva canción* with those of global forms of music. Despite not becoming popular, the band's approach anticipated the deep meanings behind these collapses between the local and the global — a critical sensitivity that I suggest still defines contemporary Ecuadorian independent music.

Latin American music cultures before *nueva canción*

Latin American music has reflected the region's diversity and culturally mixed heritage. Beyond the clichés and stereotypes as exotic, tropical, and hypersexual the recording industry has fostered, the region's culture is defined by its diversity (Rivera-Rideau & Torres, 2019: 90). From tropical regions like the Caribbean to the Andes Mountains and the Amazonian rainforest. From big cosmopolitan cities to rural indigenous zones. Every Latin American context has produced or has embraced unique sounds that respond to its territories' specific conditions and struggles. Nonetheless, a shared historical origin sets a common ground for this diversity: the conquest and the subsequent cultural and racial mixed origins of its populations.

As mentioned in chapter 1, *mestizaje* has been a dominant component of most forms of Latin American popular music cultures. It played a definitive role in creating a sense of national identity among the Latin countries since their foundations. After gaining independence from European colonies, Latin nations had to find strategies to develop their unique national identities. Music played a significant role in that regard. Emerging national identities pushed music compositions that included indigenous and rural cultures. In the late 1880s, the first traditions of this kind were named *costumbrismo* [constumbrism] (Beezly, 2018: 15).

Costumbrismo and similar aesthetic movements like *indianismo* perpetuated romantic representations of indigenous lives that reproduced eurocentric representations of the indigenous as inferior and savages (Wong, 2018: 132). However, in the 1920s, the mestizo appropriation of indigenous, rural, and black cultures took a modernist turn. A significant intellectual and plastic arts movement in that regard was *indigenismo*. These movements influenced many Latin American popular music cultures, starting a more experimental and sometimes critical perspective towards the legacy of colonialism and the modernisation of Latin America (Beezly, 2018: 20; *Ibid.*: 132). Since then, approaches from popular music to the indigenous, rural, and black cultures split in eurocentric romanticism, and more critical approaches focused on the social reality of these subaltern populations.

This contrast between romantic and critical approaches reflects how *mestizaje* has been highly problematic and paradoxical. It encompasses tensions and contradictions and thus demands multidimensional approaches. Indeed, *mestizaje* has hardly represented equity and inclusion. On the contrary, it has a long history of being a white-skinned mestizo elite's discourse that superficially celebrates mixture, generating an illusion of inclusiveness. In other words, it has been a narrative that rhetorically embraces indigenous and African roots but, in reality, establishes a hierarchy in which white mestizos remain the dominant group (Stuzman, 1981). Consequently, the mixed-raced populations are usually the middle group and, on the button, indigenous and black populations who have been the subordinates. These subaltern populations have either been under-represented or marginalised across the region. When recognised, they have been portrayed as exotic mythological objects conveniently used by the white elites (Wong, 2010).

However, it is imperative to address that this facet of *mestizaje* has not necessarily been an irreversible or contested narrative. While it has privileged the white-skin mestizos who have

naturalised their European racial and cultural heritage as superiority, the mixed, the indigenous, and black have remained. In this sense, popular music in Latin America has reflected the tensions between a white-mestizo hegemony and the resistance of indigenous and black cultures in many ways and forms. My argument here is that while popular forms of Latin popular music have reinforced this hierarchy, it has countered this narrative. *Nueva canción* and the most recent forms of alternative and independent Latin popular music have confronted the status quo and built a place where indigenous, black, and mixed traditions are embraced.

Reflecting on Homi Bhabha's ideas, John Kraniuskas (2004: 40) argues that mixed cultures could also use their hybridity as a resistance strategy to negotiate with (neo)colonial powers and generate non-eurocentric forms of modernity. A process he defines as "post-colonial agency". In other words, mestizaje could also become a form of agency for the subordinates. Thus, my argument is that Latin popular music reflects a tense and complex coexistence of the two poles of mestizaje: "an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion" (Stutzman, 1981) and a "liberating force" (Wade, 2012). Or, as Anzaldúa (1987: 78) asserted: in inhabiting multiple cultural worlds at the same time, mestizaje represents "*un choque*, a cultural collision" "of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference". Circling back to music, this chapter argues that *nueva canción* remains a milestone that best represents how music could push revolutionary political thinking.

Nueva canción and its legacy

As mentioned, at least part of the initial rejection of rock in the region was that its most revolutionary popular music cultures were focused on revaluing the local. Exploring music traditions tied to rural, indigenous, and African folk traditions became a counter-hegemonic response to cultural alienation and the advance of capitalism. That impulse shaped a popular music movement known as *nueva canción latinoamericana* [new Latin American folk], also known as *música protesta* [protest music] (Hess, 2018: 255).

Distancing from pop music coming from the United States and Europe was a strategy based on the pursuit of authenticity and an anti-status-quo political statement. It became, in fact, a consequent reaction to the historical processes that the region was going through in decades defined by the rise of right-wing dictatorships and the intervention of the United States. Most of *nueva canción's* most prominent figures came from the region's south, specifically from Chile

and Argentina. Artists such as Atahualpa Yupanqui, Violeta Parra, Victor Jara, and Mercedes Sosa became well-known figures across the region; many of their songs are still anthems for working-class political causes. However, the Cuban revolution and Cuba's *nueva canción*, also known as *nueva trova* –by singers/composers Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez– was as influential and together made up *nueva canción Latinoamericana*.

In geopolitical terms, Latin America went from being a continent subjugated to European colonial rulers to a region controlled by global homogenising forces. Therefore, re-encountering indigenous roots became a political response that aimed to resist the colonial logic of global capitalism (Kennedy, 2016: 94). In this context, *nueva canción* became the musical response to adverse cultural and political circumstances. Among the most emblematic figures of this movement were Chilean Violeta Parra and Argentinean Atahualpa Yupanqui. Both artists undertake an in-depth exploration of the folk traditions of their respective countries by travelling to rural and indigenous zones to rescue obscure music. Of course, they later incorporated these explorations into their performances and compositions, further popularising them³⁵.

Parra, Yupanqui, and later Jara's popularity across the region was due to their recognition as artists and political figures. *Nueva canción* attempted to break the logic of the imposed euro-modernity by dissolving the frontiers that separate the rural from the urban and the indigenous from the white. This way, above all, *nueva canción*'s most important social and political contribution is that it assumed the mission of bringing political awareness in times of social convulsion (Vilches, 2018:3).

In the 1970s, *nueva canción* gained further political significance as Chile became the centre of a global political re-establishment. In the previous years, the world went through significant struggles. The Cuban revolution at the end of the 1950s established a sense of political resistance to the global dominance of capitalism. France's May '68 protests inspired ways to critical thinking that spread around the world. And, the civil rights movements from the United States demonstrated that protest movements were expanding across the globe. In this context, in the early 1970s, Chile had just elected the first democratic left-wing president of the region: Salvador Allende. As a sense of change rose, the elites felt threatened and took extreme measures to reestablish the order. (Randall, 2017:75).

³⁵ For instance, they also pioneered in including Andean traditional instruments such as cuatro and charango guitars, kenas, and others into their music (Ibid).

While in power, Allende's most notable politics aimed to improve the country's educational and health care services. As a trained medical doctor, he knew how precarious the system was. In addition to that, some of Allende's revolutionary economic measures aimed to nationalise the industries and the banking system. Allende's intentions, of course, represented a direct challenge to the local elites, which happened to have strong links to US corporations. Thus, Allende faced opposition financed by the CIA during his campaign, making his victory even more impressive (Hess, 2018:256).

Still as a presidential candidate, in 1969, Allende had shown his support for Chilean *nueva canción*. He was, in fact, an honours guest at the *Primer Festival de la Nueva Canción* [First Festival of Nueva canción], celebrated at the National Stadium of Santiago. In front of a massive crowd during the event, Allende proclaimed, "there can be no revolution without songs" (Ibíd).

At this time, Victor Jara was becoming a voice of consciousness for Chile and Latin America. His songs spoke for the working class and promoted deeply socialist values, and his influence was such that he even resonated in the English-speaking world. Folk singer Phil Ochs told his brother after meeting Victor: "I just met the real thing. Pete Seeger and I are nothing compared to this. I mean here's a man who really is what he's saying." (Randall, 2017:76).

On September 11, 1973, the CIA executed a coup against Allende. US fire bombers attacked the presidential palace of Santiago, and the right-wing General Augusto Pinochet seized power. As a result, over 10,000 Chileans were killed, most of whom were students and union leaders. Among them was Victor Jara.

In the same stadium where Allende proclaimed "there can be no revolution without songs" a few years earlier, Jara was shot in the head after being brutally tortured. These events sent a powerful message: "when the ruling classes fail to win consent, they resort to ruthless coercion to achieve their aims." (Randall 2017: 77). Yet, the music of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara transcended to become anthems for liberation across the region that have kept resonating until this day. As part of the 2019 protests against the right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera, massive concentrations of people sang Jara's "*el derecho de vivir en paz*" (Simon & Wharton, 2019).

The influence of *nueva canción* spread throughout most Spanish-speaking countries of the region. Throughout the Andean region, groups replicating Chilean 1960s traditional folk ensembles like Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún started emerging. The class-conscious message aligned with the “rescue” of indigenous traditions served as a model that made sense for most of the region, and Ecuador was not an exception.

In 1970 the folk group Jatari was born, and as expected, the group assumed the mission of studying and rescuing indigenous Ecuadorian music. In other words, Jatari started the Ecuadorian version of *nueva canción* (Mullo, 2009: 45). Other Andean folk ensembles like Pueblo Nuevo, Grupo Illiniza and several more followed. These groups were integrated by mestizo males who wore traditional ponchos characteristic of Andean and indigenous ethnic groups (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Cover of Jatari's first album

For the 1970s, Latin American *nueva canción* was vastly represented by these kinds of folkloric groups. They often were close to leftist intellectual elites. As part of their political agenda, they focused on building a sense of anti-imperialist nationalism and promoted ideas about regional integration. Nonetheless, objectifying the indigenous was a problematic practice these groups often reproduced. Mullo (2009:49) asserts that the rhetoric of Latin American integration also included folkloristic practices that tended to diminish diversity while fostering a uniform “Andean style”. Thus, at its best, the *nueva canción* movement was pushed by mestizo artists honestly concerned with thinking of the indigenous beyond a mythological symbol and focused on exposing their harsh reality while denouncing its exclusion and social marginalisation. However, *nueva canción* sometimes also perpetuated colonial ways.

In sum, the 1960s and 1970s were decades that saw a Latin American region struggling to defend the sovereignty of its nations. So the consequent reaction was to strengthen nationalism while building a sense of regional cohesion that, especially in South America, leaned towards the reconnection with the rural and indigenous as a critical response and response towards globalisation and capitalism. *Nueva canción* emerged during that period and reflected ideas of resistance, nationalism, and further regional integration. Fusing roots music cultures with rock music was a slow process that, as I explored in the previous chapter, consolidated in the 1990s. The former did not implicate there were no early pioneers who even in the 1970s thought rock music was compatible with exploring the region’s roots.

In the case of Ecuador, Amauta, an ephemeral band that emerged in the 1970s, was able to fuse jazz, rock, and traditional roots fluidly. Instead of rejecting Anglo-European music styles, Amauta mixed their sound with local and regional traditions. Its approach was so cutting-edge for that time that it went pretty much unnoticed. However, despite its lack of popularity, what Amauta did in the 1970s announced what Latin American and Ecuadorian alternative forms of music would do in the decades to come. Exploring this ephemeral band today uncovers key elements to understand the contemporary scene.

Amauta: a lost chapter of the Ecuadorian independent scene.

Amauta was a self-defined progressive folk band that emerged in Quito at the end of the 1970s. Integrated by Pedro Pino D'Achiardi, Galo Larrea, Fernando Albornoz, Ángel Cobo y Tomas

Lefever, the band went unnoticed and only existed for three years. There were no traces of its existence for decades besides a couple of low-fi recordings, flyers, and press articles (Figure 8). It was, in fact, a coincidence that led me to the band. Without looking for it, my Facebook feed showed a YouTube video of a television show from the 1970s that contained a short interview and a live performance of a band named Amauta.



Figure 8. Amauta members. From left to right: Ángel Cobo, Tomas Lefever, Galo Larrea, Fernando Albornoz y Pedro Pino / Picture provided by Pedro Pino

They looked like a British prog-rock band with a flautist, but they did not play progressive rock. The music at first sounded like some kind of Andean folk played with electric instruments. Yet, it eventually transitioned into a psychedelic jam guided by a slide guitar with lots of reverb coupled with a flute. As the jam progressed, it found its way back to the original Andean composition. The performance was very intriguing. Even though the song resembled some sort of *nueva canción* that incorporated traditional Ecuadorian music, the jam that followed made it very special; it was unexpectedly experimental and unique. Something about it resonated more with today's independent bands than with what you would expect from Ecuadorian music from the 1970s.

I tried to find more information on the web and discovered what seems to be a 40-minute recording of the band uploaded on YouTube – and nothing else. I contacted the person who had uploaded the video, which happened to be Pedro Pino, the guitar player in the video, and arranged an interview. We could not meet face to face as he had returned to his home country, Chile. Before the interview, I found out that in the 1980s, Pino was part of Umbral, a local pop-rock band responsible for one of the few pop-rock hits of that decade, a ballad named “¿A dónde vas?” [where are you going?].

The story behind Pino migrating to Ecuador reflects the political environment of 1970s South America. He arrived in the country in 1974, seeking to escape the hostile environment the coup brought to Chile. During the first years of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, he tried to make it as a musician playing in bands while studying music. However, the dictatorship generated a repressive environment for college students, intellectuals, and artists. So he decided to migrate.

You could not wear a beard, either long hair. You couldn't do many things like talking with other people at campus. You couldn't have a different perspective. You couldn't own books from Pablo Neruda, because he was a “communist”. In that context, you could listen to many things [*No podías ir con barba, con el pelo muy largo. No podías hacer cosas como hablar con otras personas de la universidad, a tener ideas diferentes. No podías tener en tu casa libros de Pablo Neruda, que era comunista. Desde ese punto de vista, no se podía ni escuchar muchas cosas*].

After spending a couple of months in Argentina, he arrived in Ecuador to stay with an uncle in Guayaquil. Unfortunately, at the time, there was not an offer of music as a career at local universities, so he decided to study architecture. Three years into his studies, personal issues made him move to Quito, where he resumed his musical career.

In the capital, he reconnected with Galo Larrea – a young and talented guitar player whom Pino had met in Guayaquil– and agreed to meet with two other young musicians – guitar player, Ángel Cobo and flautist, Fernando Albornoz. The first thing they did together was put together a cover by Argentinean songwriter León Gieco, who at that time was experimenting with Andean music in songs like “*el que queda solo*”. Not happy with the cover, they started jamming in an attempt to, as Pino mentioned, “get to know each other musically”. This process extended for a couple of months until they finally decided to turn the jams into concrete compositions. All of the members shared similar musical tastes – they enjoyed rock and jazz as much as *nueva*

canción, and all of them had some level of formal education in classical music. Of course, when they finally decided to create their music, the product was a mix of all of their common influences:

In a meeting at my flat, I suggested a melody, which became the central melody and the song's intro. And one of the guys said, "let's put this phrase here", and another said, "let's make an interlude". That interlude started sounding like a mix between pasillo [a traditional style from Colombia but very popular in Ecuador] and Andean music. And then I finally said, "ok, but let's get out of it with something much more experimental". *[En una reunión en un departamento donde yo vivía, propuse una melodía, y era como el tema central, como el comienzo del tema, y uno dijo "¿qué tal si lo acompañamos?", y el otro dijo, "ya, ya, la otra frase acá," y "hagamos un intermedio" y ese intermedio empezó a sonar como entre pasillo y la música andina, y yo dije "bueno pero salgamos a una cosa un poco más experimental"]*.

This "experimental" factor was, indeed, what ended up giving Amauta the most distinctive element that differentiated the band from most of the groups of that time. At the same time, this pursuit for something different put the band on a path that reconciled the desire to innovate with tradition—an approach that, as I describe in chapters 5 and 6, has been prevalent in the newer forms of Ecuadorian independent music.

Between innovation and tradition.

Innovation and tradition might seem to be antagonistic perspectives, but as argued, the coexistence of these two has been prevalent throughout the evolution of the Latin American nations. For instance, Latin American musical nationalisms of the 1920s were far more than processes of identity formation. Nationalism from this period turned the exploration of roots and traditions into a mechanism of bringing aesthetic innovation following European avant-gardism (Den Tend and Young; 2004: 246). However, from the 1950s to the 1970s, as a regional movement, *nueva canción* opted for a "rescue" of traditions, prioritising a political agenda over experimentation and innovation. In the 1970s, this started to change. For the Ecuadorian case, Amauta was the band that, embracing the influence of *nueva canción*, tried to expand to new musical territories.

In that regard, Pino argues that mixing traditional Andean music with contemporary influences was not something they approached by a conscious choice. It instead organically happened in

jamming sessions. Of course, the exploration of root sounds was popular in most of the region. Pino tackles Chilean acts such as Los Jaivas and Grupo Congreso and Argentinean band Arcoiris as direct influences. Chilean *nueva canción* was an essential influence too. Nevertheless, the differentiating factor from these foreign references was Amauta's interest in incorporating traditional music cultures from Ecuador when the tendency among *nueva canción* artists was to standardise Andean aesthetics (Mullo, 2009: 45). As Pino asserted:

Andean music from the north of Chile is not the same as Andean music from Otavalo [an indigenous Ecuadorian town]. There are different expressions. Our motivation was based on returning to those roots that represent us, they as Ecuadorians and I, a Chilean living in Ecuador for quite some time. *[la música Andina del norte de Chile no es exactamente la música otavaleña por decir algo. Son expresiones diferentes. A nosotros lo que nos llevaba era tomar esas raíces, que además nos representaban, tanto a ellos que eran ecuatorianos, como a mi que era chileno viviendo en Ecuador por algún tiempo.]*

Moreover, despite their intentions of exploring Ecuadorian traditions, unlike most *nueva canción* ensembles of the time, the band's aim was not to "rescue tradition". To find authenticity, they consciously avoided falling into costumbrism and sought to provide a contemporary perspective over tradition by adding an "urban sense in roots music". As Pino, asserted:

We had the mission of proposing a style that intellectually emphasises that people who make folklore here played *sanjuanito* with their traditional *ponchos*, hats, and violins and played the same *sanjuanito* song for more than a hundred years, and that's ok. But, we could not play like that because it would not have been authentic because we've lived in the city and have listened to the Beatles and Bach. Thus, the natural product of what we could do had to be different. *[Teníamos un propósito de plantearle a la gente un estilo de música que intelectualmente vendría a enfatizar que la gente que hace folclor, toca un sanjuanito con sus con ponchos, sus sombreros y su violín, que vienen tocando el mismo sanjuanito los últimos 100 años, y está bien. Nosotros no podemos tocar así porque sería falso, porque hemos vivido en una ciudad y hemos escuchado a los Beatles y a Bach, entonces el resultado natural de lo nuestro tiene que ser otra cosa].*

Indeed, the music they were creating was also a philosophical exercise for the band members. Pino kept and shared concert flyers, programs, and press interviews where the band reflected and spoke about this. In one of these interviews, the band described their sound as music that starts as a "tonal interpretation" of Andean tradition which eventually finds an "atonal" exploration; a sort of journey that goes "from interpretation of the known" to an "exploration of

chaos and the unknown". As they mentioned in a different interview, the aim behind this was "a legit and nonstop effort of breaking established rules and expanding the spectrum of an increasingly freer Latin American music" [*un esfuerzo serio e ininterrumpido de romper barreras y ampliar el horizonte de una música latinoamericana cada vez más libre*]. Likewise, Fernando Albornoz encapsulates the avant-gardism of the project context by asserting:

We urge people to find our [Latin American] identity and future in the integration of all popular art movements as a popular force based on the rupture and reconstruction of all the forms and canons and to revive the culture that belongs to us as Latin Americans. [*Hacemos un llamado a encontrar nuestra identidad y nuestro futuro, con la integración de todos los movimientos artísticos como fuerza popular, en base a la ruptura y la reconstrucción de todas las formas y preceptos, y por el resurgimiento de una cultura nuestra a nivel latinoamericano*].

This quest for innovation was Amauta's most attractive attribute. The group thought of their music as a philosophical reflection of the reality they were living in, and, in the process, they faced a dilemma. They embraced *nueva canción* political imprint. Likewise, they knew that reconnecting with the rural and, in this case, the indigenous was a form of resistance worth assuming as mestizo Latin Americans. Nonetheless, they perceived that limiting tradition only to be a tradition and reproducing what others were doing was restricting and even contradictory. Hence, they saw infusing tradition with other elements as a possibility of expanding music and its identity. In other words, a strategy that is not thought to fit into an identity mould but to avoid it. In that sense, Amauta concreted the "cultural collapse" of different worlds asserted by Anzaldúa (1987). A sort of emotional link between the worlds that coexisted in the Quito of that time: the urban, the rural, the traditional, the modern, the indigenous, and the European. It was a proposal looking at the future while digging into the country's cultural past. An innovation fueled by tradition was rare in the Ecuadorian popular music of that time.

Electric expansions and their contemporary resonances

A definitive moment for Amauta was the inclusion of Chilean composer, poet, and essayist, Tomás Lefever, who, just like Pino, arrived in the country escaping from the dictatorship. Lefever almost doubled the age of the rest of the members; nevertheless, he saw something exciting in Amauta that motivated him to join the band. Considering Lefever's vast trajectory, Pino and the

rest of the young guys took his interest in joining the band as a huge compliment³⁶. With him on the keyboards, Amauta's sound went from being an electro-acoustic quartet to a typical rock or jazz ensemble that includes electric instruments such as keyboard, bass, electric guitars, and a drum set. Moreover, Pino assures that the inclusion of electric instruments facilitated mixing modern, classical music, and traditional Andean influences.

During the same period, Polibio Mayorga, a prolific Ecuadorian songwriter, saw similar potential in the electrical sound of keyboards. Although his musical interests were in regional styles like cumbia and Ecuadorian traditional music and far from popular Anglo-American music styles, Mayorga experimented with the emerging electronic sounds of the early 1970s. It was common to use electronic organs in churches, and eventually, cumbia orchestras started incorporating these instruments as a substitute for the accordion. However, Mayorga's interests were more advanced. He began composing cumbia and traditional Ecuadorian music experimenting with a mini-Moog synthesiser, an instrument now known for its use by cutting-edge Anglo-American and European artists of the time.

In a recent interview, Mayorga reflected on his use of the synthesiser and asserted that he did it to “expand the perspective of our [Ecuadorian traditional] music]” and to potentiate its internationalisation (Bonfin, 2020: 57). It is worth considering that the 1970s was a decade in which international forms of music, mainly tropical Caribbean music like cumbia, balada, *nueva*

³⁶ After interviewing Pino, I decided to dig deeper into Lefefer's life, and to my surprise, I found a good amount of information. The Chilean had produced an extensive repertoire of compositions for film, television, and theatre plays. He was also a poet and essayist who specialised in musicology. However, while celebrated by Chilean scholars and intellectuals, most of his work failed to reach the massive recognition it deserved. Posthumous press articles and papers about Lefefer, remark how he approached music as a form of expression capable of confronting the philosophical dilemmas of his time (Soubllette, 2003). They also mentioned that the context he inhabited was not ready to appreciate his work and ideas. His participation in Amauta could be interpreted as proof of the band's potential. A band that, just like him, emerged in a context incapable of understanding the significance and value of what they were doing.

canción, and Anglo-European pop trends like disco and 1960s rock n' roll were displacing Ecuadorian national music from its popularity (Wong, 2011: 89). Where others were seeing a threat, Mayorga found an opportunity. Like Amauta, Mayorga saw new sounds and new technologies as a possibility for expanding local sounds and opening new doors through tradition.

Nevertheless, despite Mayorga's vast production, he is not widely remembered in Ecuador, even considering that some of his cumbia compositions impacted neighbouring countries. It seems that Ecuador of the 1970s was not ready for Amauta and Mayorga's innovative approach. Interestingly, for Amauta and Mayorga, these new trends were not threats but opportunities to expand the local sound repertory and move Ecuadorian traditions to new territories. Unfortunately, their attempts did not catch enough attention. Yet, almost fifty years ago, what they did has become part of the ethos of contemporary Ecuadorian independent music.

In recent years, Mayorga has become a cult artist. His double approach, attached to tradition but thirsty for innovation, resonates with the new wave of Ecuadorian independent artists exploring new technological possibilities. In 2016, for instance, the Latin branch of Noisey Music by Vice published an article entitled "*Polibio Mayorga: El maestro perdido de la tropicalia ecuatoriana*" [Polibio Mayorga: the lost master of the Ecuadorian Tropicalia]. Likewise, in 2018, Native instruments, an international company that produces gear for electronic music production, did the documentary *Misho Takay – Innovation Meets Tradition in Ecuador's Electronic Music Scene*. The documentary portrays several of the most prolific contemporary Ecuadorian electronic artists and producers. Quixosis tackles Mayorga's influence and traces a parallel between Mayorga's 1970s work and the sounds produced by the contemporary scene. Finally, in 2020, a book/zine I published through Radio COCOA includes an interview with Mayorga made by Pedro Bonfin, the frontman of the indie band Lolabúm. In it, Mayorga reflects on his use of synthesisers for producing cumbia and traditional Ecuadorian music³⁷.

Amauta's case is much more obscure than Mayorga's, well-known by other artists and frequently hired as an arranger. The band never even had the chance to record a proper album. The only remains of the band's existence are just some tracks recorded precariously, the live performance they did on a television show, and a one-track recording of one of their live

³⁷ In the same publication I included an extended version of the interview and research of Amauta.

performances. The latter turned out to be one of the most important in the band's short life. On that occasion, Amauta shared the stage with Jaime Guevara, with whom Pedro argues they shared the same ability to fluidly go from rock music to traditional music (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Amautas flyer used for promoting the concert in Teatro Sucre.

However, despite not having done a significant number of live shows and not having recorded an album, Amauta impacted key people. Pino remembers that years after Amauta broke up, he found an interview with fellow musician Hugo Idrovo. In the interview, Idrovo allegedly mentioned that he went to the show Amauta shared with Guevara, expecting to see a group of

“*emponchados*” (a pejorative term to refer to folkloric groups who wear *ponchos*). To his surprise, what he saw and listened to that day impacted him to the point of feeling inspired to form Promesas Temporales — a short-lived pop-rock ensemble that incorporated elements from Latin American and Ecuadorian music traditions. The other members of the band were the former Amauta’s flautist Fernando Alvornoz, Héctor Napolitano and Alex Alvear³⁸. They have been very influential to the newer generation of independent artists. In the last decade, Alvear, besides a prolific solo career, started projects like Mango Blue and Wañikta Tonic, projects that have kept exploring the fusion of modern urban sounds and Ecuadorian music traditions.

Entering the new millennium, all that remained of Amauta was kept in Pino's drawers, and the project seems to be condemned to oblivion. Nonetheless, in 2004, a Chilean sound engineer collecting Latin American fusion music found the video of Amauta in that Ecuadorian TV show. Just like I did, he got in touch with Pino and asked him for recordings of the band. The collector created a fake album cover with this material and uploaded it to his blog as an actual Amauta album. Then, in 2014, someone found the blog and uploaded the fake album to his account on YouTube. The same year, Spanish record label Munster Records found the recordings on the internet and decided to include Amauta’s track *Variaciones de Amauta* in a compilation entitled “*Inventiones. La otra vanguardia musical en Latinoamérica 1976-1988*” [Inventions. The other Latin American avant-garde 1976-1988]. This compilation, which was launched in vinyl, CD, and streaming platforms like Spotify, contains recordings of artists from all over the region. Artists who during that period generated an experimental turn in Latin American music but did not make a massive impact. In the brochure of the album, a text describes the spirit of this compilation on the following terms:

Many of the artists on this record have acquired cult status and are key figures in regards to understanding the cultural periods they belong to in their respective countries. But as such, they have also been atypical figures and reflect a sensibility that was spreading across Latin America back then: a spirit of experimentation that was redefining musical directions in the region. More than a movement, it was a group of individuals who worked on counterculture projects. Notwithstanding this mosaic of different sounds, several trends can be identified: free use of folk, open compositions, explorations of the boundaries of rock, and experimentation with technology.

³⁸ Napolitano, Idrovo, and Alvear started soloist careers and are still active musicians.

The 1970s in Latin America represented a period of further access to regional and global forms that entangled regional ideals, notions of music nationalism, and the invasion of popular music from the United States and Europe. As a consequence, experimental approaches to the region's traditions emerged throughout this decade. Despite not becoming immediately popular or never actually achieving popularity, these experimental approaches marked what independent music cultures became in the following decades. While the 1970s were a period in which the independent Ecuadorian scene – as an actual scene – was not even in its infancy, this was a time where the problem of embracing tradition while not quitting innovation started being confronted by early precursors like Amauta and Mayorga.

As I asserted in the previous chapter, Ecuadorian independent music, which started as a rock scene, has expanded to a more diverse range of independent styles in the last two decades. Nonetheless, tradition as a motor for the new has remained and intensified over time. Indeed, and as I tackle in the following chapters, new ways for collapsing tradition and experimentation have kept emerging both within and beyond rock. Independent metal, hip hop, electronic and pop acts such as Guardarraya, Mugre Sur, Curare, Nicola Cruz, Quixosis, and the Swing Original Monks made up a vibrant scene producing sounds on which mestizo identities keep expanding and finding new sensitivities.

Reflecting on the value of the contemporary artists, I asked Pino to give a message to them based on his experience in Amauta. He first tackled the influence that Violeta Parra had on him and his colleagues. He then asserted: “Let’s not become prisoners of something, let’s be capable of breaking the mould, even if you are trying to rescue folk traditions, or roots, the most important thing is to be capable of breaking schemes.” [*no nos encuadremos en algo, seamos capaces de romper los esquemas, más allá que uno esté ligado al rescate del folclor, o de la música de raíz, lo importante es que seamos capaces de romper esquemas*].

Final reflections: on the contemporary role of tradition and a response to globalisation

Before the 1950s, most Latin American music styles operated mainly within their national boundaries. *Nueva canción* is for Latin America the first example of a music culture that, despite promoting nationalism, became a regional music phenomenon. Its sounds and idiosyncrasies promoted a sense of regional unity and tackled global geopolitical issues to pursue an independent Latin American. *Nueva canción* also made evident that music can encourage change and destabilise power by fostering a musical mestizaje not ashamed of its indigenous roots. In that sense, it showed that re-embracing the past became a strategy to confront the spread of global imperialism.

However, the localism that *nueva canción* promoted was eventually transcended. For Ecuador, Amauta and Mayorga were early examples that showed that what *nueva canción* promoted was not incompatible with global influences. It demonstrated that the pursuit of authenticity by reconnecting with traditions is not necessarily inconsistent with innovation. Paraphrasing, Anzaldúa (1987), the mestizaje that has defined the region is and has been the coming together of incompatible frames. As mestizo populations, our cultural survival relies on our capacity to include rather than exclude.

The evidence and arguments presented in this chapter showed that the thread that globalisation represents for traditions does not necessarily erase them. Traditions instead are revived, transformed, and become vehicles for the new. That said, the permanence of indigenous and African roots in Latin American culture must be seen as signs of the region's resistance.

As announced in the previous chapter, in the 1980s and more evidently in the 1990s, the exploration of local music cultures and a desire to innovate through modern global sounds became more common across the region. New waves of Latin American artists that define themselves as alternative or independent have continuously been emerging. And with them, new forms of musical mestizaje product of multiple collapses between the seemingly opposed local and global forces, the rural and the urban, and the indigenous and the colonial. The

foreword for Ernesto Lechner's *Rock en Español "The Latin Alternative Rock Explosion*, written by Saul Hernández (2006, viii) of the Mexican band, Jaguares express very well the ethos of Latin alternative and independent music:

Like the most powerful hurricane, we will continue travelling, denouncing everything that hurts and kills us. By screaming and spitting on the face of the system, we will rescue all that is lost. Reflecting spilled philosophies, seductive rhythms, and wounded melodies, we will try to touch your soul. What for? To wake you up. Better wounded than asleep, like Olivero Girondo said.

Hence, in the following chapter, I focus on the consolidation of the independent Ecuadorian scene and its contemporary relationship with the indigenous and afro-cultural roots of the country and the region.

Chapter 5

***Diablo-huma*: Independent music as “a political exercise of identity”**

So far, I have traced back the emergence of the rock music scene in Ecuador and explained how it established a critical agenda against the status quo. I have also described how incorporating local indigenous and rural cultures became a definitive political component of regional popular music throughout the 20th century. This chapter explores how Ecuadorian independent music started incorporating local indigenous and rural cultures at the turn of the century. This period consolidated the scene’s idiosyncrasy as it is today. Tackling local and regional traditions became a way of finding a sense of authenticity that has kept inspiring the emergence of new critical music cultures. The permanence of tradition in emerging forms represents a decolonising strategy that produces hybrid forms of music. This hybridity operates on many dimensions. It collapses the global and the local, past and present, and vernacular traditions with euro-modernity.

As argued in chapter 3, the regional context significantly influenced the local scene. First, *Rock en español* and then the explosion of the Latin alternative rock scene of the 1990s broke the idea of rock as an anglo-cultural import and established a route of innovation through the exploration of tradition across the region. Thus, this chapter focuses on the unique ways the local scene adopts and adapts traditional elements to the whole experience of independent music. Of course, a route of local exploration through the global emerged in the 1970s with Amauta and Polibio Mayorga, in the 1980s with Tahual and Promesas Temporales, and in the 1990s with bands like Sobrepeso and Sal y Mileto. Nonetheless, at the turn of the century, the inclusion of local traditional cultures went beyond the music. It increasingly became part of the aesthetic of live performances and the experience of live events from the audience’s perspective. Hence, it is fair to say that the inclusion of indigenous and rural traditional elements became an integral part of Ecuadorian independent music.

For the last two decades, incorporating elements from rural celebrations locally known as *fiestas populares* [folkloric parades] has become common among artists, event producers, and fans. The most emblematic of these elements is the *aya-uma* or *diablo huma* mask (Figure 10). As

this chapter aims to reveal, *aya-uma* reflects deep connotations and tensions between the indigenous and mestizo heritage of Ecuadorian culture while fostering an alternative sense of belonging to the mestizo heritage.

It is worth mentioning that so far, the focus has been on the producer's side of things and in the messages embedded in the music. However, what follows considers the appropriation of tradition, not only by the artists but also by the audiences. Therefore, this is an ethnographic exploration of the ritualistic ways independent music is experienced in the 21st century. This exploration implies tackling the convergences between Ecuadorian *fiestas populares* and independent music cultures in which the *diablo-huma* mask has played an emblematic role. But before delving into the matter, I must add a caveat.



Figure 10. Kid wearing a diablo-huma mask in Quitofest 2014, one of the most important independent music festivals of the country, during the presentation of the band Curare. Photographer: Juan Pablo Viteri

The sense of belonging to a specific culture and a country are aspects of social life that involve deep, complex, and paradoxical engagements that are not necessarily rational or logical. Following Amehd (2015), individuals make sense of their relationship with their local context – nationalistic feelings and the connection with their cultural heritage – rather than

rational/objective processes that are mainly affective and thus subjective. Consequent with this, the testimonies and symbolic practices I present here come, to a considerable extent, from the emotional and personal ways in which individuals understand their sense of belonging to the scene to Ecuador and Latin America. And while my position as a researcher demands generating a critical distance with my subjects and objects of study, I must mention that the interpretations and arguments I present here are also mediated by these affections.

Crossing over temporalities: independent music and *fiestas*

populares converged

Ecuadorian metal bands have been mixing the extreme sound of distorted electric guitars with Andean wind instruments for over two decades. Other artists have been producing digital sounds that blend with traditional instruments samples taken from old recordings of traditional Ecuadorian music. Likewise, hip-hop acts rap, switching from Spanish to native Andean languages. These mixed aesthetics demonstrate that independent music has become a space in which the limits dividing the modern from the traditional, the global from the local, the urban from the rural are increasingly blurring. And, as mentioned, those mixed aesthetics have permeated the audience's experience.

At independent music festivals in Ecuador –it does not matter if they are around a specific independent style like metal, electronic, indie, or hip-hop– chances are there will be people in the audience and on stage wearing a colourful woollen mask. It has two faces, one on the front and in the back, two ears, four eyes, and two mouths with the tongue sticking out. On top of the head hang 12 or 13 wool sticks. Often, fans wearing it are the most enthusiastic members of the audience. They usually are dancing or moshing while pushing others to join their excitement. Even in events headlined by international artists, it has become a tradition to throw the Ecuadorian flag, the football national team jersey, or this mask to the artists on stage as a souvenir from the audience —a gift for the artists to take with them something representative of Ecuador.

The mask in question belongs to the *aya-uma*, also known as *diablo-huma*; a mythological character that comes from the traditional celebrations in the countryside of the Andean region known as *fiestas populares*. In its original context, the mask holds deep meanings and connotations. Yet, in the context of independent music events, these meanings have mutated to empower these music cultures, as this chapter aims to explain. In that sense, the inclusion of the mask should not be assumed as a shallow appropriation of an exotic element. Instead, how and why was it adopted and adapted in this new context? How are the original meanings of the mask transforming in the process? Why has it become so emblematic of Ecuadorian culture and the scene? Is it fostering an alternative perspective of identity? And finally, what does its inclusion reveal about the meaning of tradition in the contemporary context of the independent music scene?

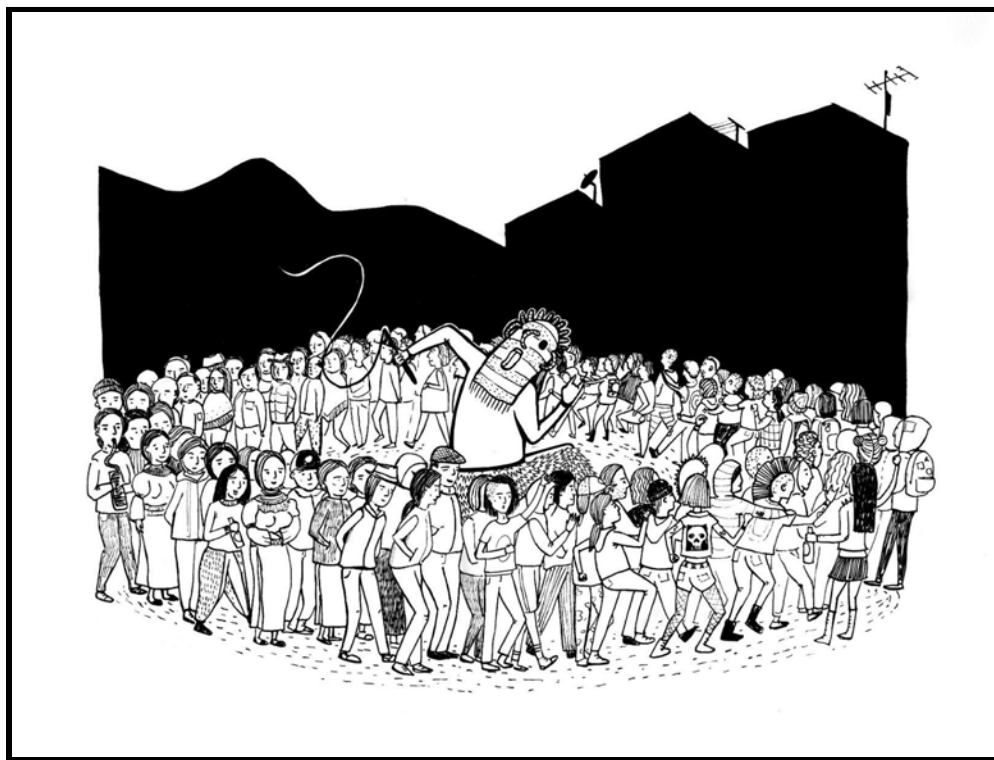


Figure 11. Illustration of the diablo-huma by Canela Samaniego. At the centre is the traditional *aya-huma* surrounded by a mix of a traditional parade of *fiestas populares* and a rock concert mosh pit. On the back and the left side are the Andes mountains, and on the right side are buildings that represent modern Ecuadorian cities. This illustration was included in *R-ZINE Vol. 1* as part of an article I wrote on the *aya-huma* and Ecuadorian independent music.

To study the *diablo-huma* mask's contemporary meaning in-depth is necessary to understand the cultural context to which it originally belongs: *fiestas populares*. With that context established, the next step is to reflect on the meaning behind the migration of practices and symbols from the traditional rural context of *fiestas populares* to the modern urban context of independent music live events. Finally, the chapter focuses on uncovering how *diablo-huma* arrived first at rock events to represent the scene. This exploration aims to deepen the symbolic mestizo practices that have defined the countercultural ethos of the contemporary Ecuadorian independent scene.

Urban hegemony and rural resistance: on the meaning of *fiestas populares*

Fiestas populares are traditional celebrations widespread across the Latin American Andean region. Their multiple colours, unique rituals, and complex symbolisms are the expressions of multiple layers of syncretisms between indigenous and catholic cosmovisions (Valarezo, 2016). In modern urban contexts such as Quito, *fiestas populares* are disappearing, but these carnivalesque celebrations are prevalent in little towns in the countryside. Urban growth is at the same time a process of modernisation. However, following a eurocentric logic, modernisation in Latin America as a process has generated a hierarchical dichotomy between the modern-urban and the pre-modern-rural.

In many Andean cities, white-mestizo elites have pushed modernisation that saw in European logics development and progress (Kingman, 1993:15). Thus, tradition, especially when tied to indigenous roots, became undesirable for the emerging urban zones and, consequently, relegated to the rural. This spatial separation eventually became a sort of temporal distinction. Modern urban centres came to represent progress, and the rural countryside started representing the past and underdevelopment. Nevertheless, white elites could not break ties with the rural as they relied on indigenous working-class populations to bring food from the countryside for servitude and blue-collar jobs. So, two opposed temporalities started coexisting within Latin American cities, although in hierarchical ways: modernity and tradition (Canclini, 2005, Kingman, 1992).

Consequent with this under-valorisation of the rural, social sciences as anthropology dedicated to the study of indigenous groups, for a long time neglected the study of *fiestas populares*. For

such sciences, Kingman (1992: 17) argues, indigenous groups were a valid object of study only when they could represent a static pre-modern group and primitive cultures. However, *fiestas populares*, despite belonging mainly to rural contexts, continuously transform and mutate. Recent studies argue that fiestas populares are so unique that they deserve far more studies (Cabay, 2000:11-12). Indeed, Gonzáles (2002) argues that *fiestas populares* are probably mestizaje's most profound aesthetic expression. They display the complexity and contradictions of the Ecuadorian populations' multiple roots and their ability to incorporate diversity in subversive ways.

A remarkable aspect of *fiestas populares* is the intensity in which they are experienced. They demand a deep level of commitment as many of their motivations are religious. They involve feasts of typical food, heavy drinking, and playing characters such as the *aya-uma*, music and dances that extend for days (Encalada Vásquez, 2005: 11). That is why they become particularly relevant when around religious celebrations such as Christmas, Corpus Christi³⁹, San Juan⁴⁰, and Inti Raymi⁴¹. Many catholic celebrations, in fact, often happen on the exact dates of agricultural cycles. In these celebrations, a great mixture of pre-colonial and catholic elements displays the customs of each celebration.

Despite *fiestas populares*' exuberance and deep symbolism, they have been neglected as simple folkloric leisure activities. This underrecognition is the effect of industrialization and the division of labour incompatible with non-profitable symbolic practices (Turner 1986: 46). However, their ritualistic function and the reason they have remained is that they enable a rupture of the everyday rules of modern life —a sort of break from routine and labour obligations (Vásquez 2005: 5). In this sense, *fiestas populares* play a political role: they break the impositions and hierarchies of euro-modernization. They enable a resistance through rituality — a counter-logic based on creating intersections between religiosity, subjectivity, and multiple identities on the margins of alienating modern and colonial orders. *Fiestas populares*' counter-cultural value explains why they are experiencing so devotedly. Indeed, this liberating attribute eventually allowed convergences between *fiestas populares* and rock concerts.

³⁹ A celebration in honour of Christ sixty days after the resurrection.

⁴⁰ A celebration in honour of Saint John the Baptist.

⁴¹ An Andean and Inca celebration of the god Inti (god sun).

Parallel worlds: contemporary independent music and fiestas populares

The incorporation of traditional elements shown by the Ecuadorian scene increasingly includes elements taken from *fiestas populares*. As mentioned, despite their evident and profound differences, there are many similarities between traditional fiestas and modern independent music events. A contemporary band that best reflects this tendency is The Swing Original Monks (TSOM). Emerging in the early 2010s, the band based its whole identity on the mix of cultural elements coming from different sources. Indeed, they have described their sound as “*fanesca musical*” after a traditional soup from the Ecuadorian Andes whose main characteristic is using all kinds of ingredients from the country’s different regions. In a YouTube⁴² clip produced for their crowdfunding campaign, they further explained how the recipe of their sound is on mixing elements:

Everything comes from everything. Something made things happen when they got mixed. We are a mixture of atoms, chromosomes, red blood cells and white blood cells, heartbeats, rhythms, skins, styles, meat with vegetables. Here we speak “*Chaulofañol*”⁴³ Anglo Andino” the language of all languages. We are from everywhere, but we live in Ecuador, a country that is not an imaginary line. The place where cultures mix together. The Andes with the jungle, the volcanoes with The Galápagos, bananas with cheese, mango with salt, and everything, absolutely with hot sauce. We didn’t invent rock but we invented the balkan merengue swing. We don’t dance one rhythm, we dance all of them. We mix music with theatre, silence with animal sounds. Popular music with electronic music. We are the band that mixes everything. We are the Swing Original Monks. (Swing Original Monks, 2015).

As one of the most innovative local independent bands, TSOM owes its popularity to the creative ways they integrate local folk traditions. The band made a song entitled “*fiesta popular*” whose lyrics cleverly emphasise the rupture these celebrations represent in terms of class and ethnic hierarchies:

⁴²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZo-w7oobil>

⁴³ *Chaufañol* is a mix between the words “*chaulafan*”, a dish served in Chinese food restaurants in Ecuador and Perú, and “*español*”. Even though *chaulafan* is served in these restaurants, the dish was created in Ecuador and Perú by mixing the leftovers of actual traditional Chinese dishes.

Aaay the balance is broken
There is no need for measurements, no
need for weighting
There is no need for faking, no need for
silence
Invite the rich, the poor, and the indigent,
the nobles or the unhealthy, here there is
no social class
Invite all of the saints, the demons, the
scares,
the clowns, dogs, and cats they cannot
take a long time

[Aaay la balanza se rompe
ya no hay que medir, ya no hay que
pesar
ya no hay que fingir, ya no hay que
callar
inviten a los más ricos, a los pobres y
mendigos
los nobles o insalubres, aquí no hay
clase social
inviten a todos los santos, los diablos,
los espantos
los payasos, perros, gatos no se
pueden demorar]
(Swing Original Monks, 2013)

Clearly, TSOM understood that although *fiestas populares* and contemporary music events represent such despair contexts, they could converge. After all, as performed rituals, they share a common aim: to generate momentary spaces for escaping the implicit order of modern everyday life. Within both rituals, there is a form of resistance to modern logic, which also represents a form of counter colonisation in the Latin American context.

Rock music cultures, for instance, introduced ritualistic practices such as mosh pits. As Riches (2011: 322), following Turner's (1979) concept of liminality, explains, the pit in punk and metal events could be interpreted as "a ritually organised time out from the rules and regulations of everyday life." Moreover, it is not a coincidence that popular music subcultures are often associated with the lower class and subordinate groups (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts 2003: 45). In that matter, it is worth considering that in Latin America, class is, almost inevitably, intersected by ethnic tensions that are inherited from colonial origins. Hence, as this chapter explains in the following sections, convergences between independent music and *fiestas populares*, besides countering class hierarchies, imply a confrontation towards the permanence of colonial logics.

Moving between rurality and the urban contemporary with critical intentions has become an essential ritualistic aspect of the scene. As mentioned, whether it is metal, hip-hop, electronic or pop music, increasingly Ecuadorian independent music crosses the boundaries separating tradition from modernity. A symbol of that crossover is the *aya-uma* mask. Indeed, the mask

encapsulates complex meanings about Ecuadorian mestizaje. Therefore, its inclusion in independent music cultures also reflects how mestizaje is lived and performed in independent music cultures.

The origins of the *aya-uma* (*diablo-huma*)

Although the *aya-uma* has become a popular character in many celebrations across the Ecuadorian Andean region, it comes from Cayambe, a small town in the north of Quito, inhabited by the Kichwa-Otavalo and Cayambi indigenous peoples. As an essential component of the parades in fiestas populares, the role of the *aya-uma* is to escort the musicians and instate people to join the dance in a similar way to the Italian harlequin (Navarrete, 2013: 20). In addition to the mask, the character must wear a white shirt and fur chaps and carry a whip. With it, the *aya-uma* pushes people to join the celebration as a pastor herding cattle.

There might be slight variations in the *aya-uma*'s elements and the mask's fabrics and colours. There are different interpretations of its meanings and connotations depending on whom you ask. For the past three years, in interviews or informal conversations, I have asked many people I have spotted wearing the mask about what they think the mask represents. As expected, there were similarities in the answers. Still, there were unique interpretations that some of the subjects added. In other words, the *aya-uma* meanings have not been written in stone. There is no official text or manual where the history and meanings of the *diablo-huma* are established, not even exact dates of when it emerged. Most of the ideas on the character, common in folk traditions, are transmitted by word of mouth. Nonetheless, the most detailed information on the *aya-uma* is *Aya-Uma: La sabiduría del silencio de los Andes* by the indigenous researcher, Luis Enrique Cachihuango, in 2014.

According to Cachihuango (2014:14), there are two ways to refer to this character: *diablo huma* and *aya-uma* have different connotations and origins. *Diablo*, Spanish for "devil", is probably the most used by mestizos and outsiders. However, this demonisation of the character responds to a white-mestizo attempt to diminish it following catholic morals. On the other hand, *aya* is a Kichwa⁴⁴ word that stands for the masculine and un-balancing spirit of nature, and it is used to refer to the souls of the dead that stayed in this world. *Uma*, or *huma*, stands for "head", "guide", and "leader". So, *aya-uma* refers to a kind of spiritual leader. As Cachiguango (2014) explains,

⁴⁴ *Kichwa* is a variation of the *Quechua* language, widely common throughout the Andean region.

the *aya-uma* is "the guide of the people and the spiritual personification of the *Pacha-Mama* [mother earth] or the mother-existence in all of her integrity." [*el guía y orientador de su pueblo y la personificación espiritual de la Pacha-Mama o madre existencia en toda su integridad.*].

Each of the elements of the character has a specific meaning. Firstly, Cachiguango (2014) mentions that whoever decides to wear the tradition is willing to represent nature's masculine and feminine spirit. He should be prepared to follow the path of "wisdom and spirituality". In the celebrations, the *aya-uma* is supposed to be the one who starts the festivities and the last to leave. The white shirt represents the power of the spiritual world, so it poses the ancestors' wisdom. The fur chaps refer to the pain and abuse inflicted by the mestizo butler in the haciendas. So when the people wear this pledge, it represents regaining power and leadership over the community. The whip is a symbol of "human and spiritual authority". Furthermore, the action of wiping the floor aims purification as a method to scare "bad spirits" (Ibid).

Of course, the main component and most recognisable is the mask. Its big round eyes represent deepness and wisdom. The tongue that is always hanging out represents the language of the *Pacha Mama*. The mouth is not functional as the *aya-uma* communicates through signs and body language. On top of the mask, 12 or 13 hanging tubes represent the agricultural cycles: 12 if it was a solar (male) year or 13 if it was a lunar (female) year. Finally, the multiple colours of the mask represent the diversity and "generosity" of the *Pacha Mama* and the diversity of the indigenous nationalities (Ibid, 16).

Perhaps the unique aspect of the mask is the two faces –one facing front and the other on the back. These two faces may represent an Andean conception of time, distinct from the conventional euro-linear conception in which the past and future meet in the present:

This double view is a message of wisdom for our people, pointing out that if they want to walk towards the future, they should not stop looking at the past because the future is inscribed in the past. Eventually, the past becomes the future. Everything has a Pachakutin, a change, a transformation to return; it is nature's law. [*Esta doble mirada es un mensaje de sabiduría para nuestros pueblos indicando que si quieren caminar al futuro nunca dejen de mirar al pasado porque el futuro está "escrito" en el pasado. En algún momento el pasado se vuelve futuro. Todo tiene un Pachakutin, un cambio, una transformación para volver de nuevo, es la ley de la naturaleza.*] (Cachiguango, 2014:17)

The character's role involves both spiritual and political connotations that bring light to the complexities and unsolved tensions around shifting the notion of mestizaje. For that reason, it has transcended the small towns in which it originated, becoming a ubiquitous presence in most *fiestas populares* across the Andean region. Furthermore, *aya-uma* has even expanded its limits to the contemporary urban contexts of the cities on which a new generation is in the process of redefining local identities mixing the contrasting temporalities of the modern and the traditional.



Figure 12. A mural of a kid playing the guitar wearing an aya-uma mask on one of the main streets of Cuenca. Retrieved from

Diablo-huma enters the rock concert

In the early years of the new millennium, I started spotting people wearing the “*diablo-huma*” mask at rock concerts and small festivals. At first, two up-coming bands were wearing the mask on-stage: La Rocola Bacalao and Curare. Expectedly, both bands are known for fusing rock with folk traditions, but each in a different style. La Rocola mixes Latin styles like cumbia, salsa, reggae, and ska with punk-rock and all sorts of Ecuadorian traditional music. On the other hand, Curare is a metal and hardcore band that mixes with traditional Andean music elements. As these bands started gaining recognition early in the 2000s, more and more fans began wearing the mask they saw them wearing on stage. Nowadays, because of these acts, *fiestas populares* and independent music live events have one common element: the *diablo-huma*.

I must confess that the presence of the mask felt so natural that at first, I did not question why this element of *fiestas populares* became so prevalent in independent music concerts. It just made sense, as it was originally conceived to be part of both of these contexts. After all, mestizaje incorporates contrasting cultures and temporalities. But as Rivera (2010) explains, in mestizaje, cultural differences coexist, not necessarily or entirely mixing. Sometimes they antagonise while others complement each other. Beyond music scenes, in many of the everyday practices of Latin cultures, modernity and tradition are in perpetual tension while they coexist.

The mask eventually became so prevalent that it became clear that it was not a casualty. Hence, for the interests of this thesis, I decided to locate and speak to the perpetrators of taking the mask from the traditional contexts of *fiestas populares* to the modern contemporary independent music events. Of course, my intention was to tell the story of how the *aya-uma* entered the Ecuadorian scene and explain what the mask means and how it reflects the values of this scene.



Figure 13. A punk fan putting on the diablo-huma. Photographer: Juan Pablo Viteri



Figure 14. Diablo-huma mask worn by local hardcore punk band, Mortal Decision, in 2016 edition of the QuitoFest Festival. The mask was thrown on stage by a member of the audience. Photographer: Juan Pablo Viteri

Rocola Bacalao and the power in tradition

Rocola Bacalao is one of the scene's most popular bands and one of the few that have toured internationally. José Fabara, the band trombonist and manager, is most recognised as the pioneer of wearing the *diablo-huma* mask on-stage. Fans and artists have many times confirmed this to me. It could be that someone might have worn the mask on stage before him, but they are not widely remembered for doing it. So, interviewing him to uncover how the *diablo-huma* entered the independent music scene was a must.

Fabara's first encounter with the *diablo-huma* happened in the early 2000s while he was visiting the town of Cayambe during the Inti Raymi celebrations – an ancient Andean holiday dedicated to the god Inti (sun) during the summer solstice. The contemporary version of the holiday in Ecuador is a *fiesta popular* that gathers people wearing customs, parades, music, and dances in public spaces such as streets and plazas. In Cayambe and nearby towns, one of the central characters of this celebration is the *diablo-huma*. Fabara was intrigued by the character's presence and asked some locals about his meaning and role. As he recalls, they told him that:

He [*diablo-huma*] is kind of the warrior of the celebration. He is the one that resists. He is the devil. He forces people to drink and cannot faint. He has to keep going and going and going because if he is active, the party keeps going, but if he falls, the party is over. [*Él es como el guerrero en la fiesta, y él es el que aguanta, y él es el diablo, y él es el que da de tomar, y él no puede caerse. Él no puede desplomarse. Él tiene que seguir. Él tiene que ser súper fuerte y solamente seguir, seguir, seguir, porque si él sigue, toda la fiesta sigue. Si el se cae, la fiesta se acaba*].

Fabara recalls being approached by a *diablo-huma* who repeatedly offered him alcohol and noticed that the devil was paying “too much attention” to him. The next day, in a popular market for tourists in the town of Otavalo, he and his friends found a place where they were selling *diablo-huma*'s masks. As they were trying the masks on, a lady approached and gave him one of the masks as a gift. This experience, he confesses, generated a sort of commitment towards the *diablo-huma*, as it was a calling to embrace his spirit. And so, Fabara started wearing it on stage while playing with the band.

The first time Fabara wore the mask, he remembers feeling a “unique energy”. Very excited, he asserted:

I started acting as someone else, some who wasn't who I was. Being there, I had the freedom to be and do whatever I wanted to. Because, at the end of the day, it was kind of an alter ego [...]. And I felt the power. I felt, I don't know, that it even empowered me on a personal level but even more so on stage. I felt more energy to play my instrument, a heavy instrument to carry around the stage. *[Me empezaba a comportar de una forma que no necesariamente era quien yo era, sino que al estar ahí, tenía libertad de ser y hacer lo que yo quería hacer. Porque a la final estaba, digamos, siendo, no sé si un alter ego. [...] Y sentía un poder. Sentía una fuerza que me ayudó, inclusive a mí personalmente, aún más en el escenario. Como a empezar a moverme más en todo el espacio del escenario, y además con este instrumento grande y que, además, sentía que me daba mucha más fuerza]*

Reflecting on what the mask has represented for the band, Fabara adds that the mask's power also contributed to awakening a more rebellious side that showed in the band's performances. Rocola Bacalao is known for its naughtiness and punk rock attitude on stage. Defying authority is a constant in their lyrics, where they often question the corruption of local governments and social inequality and incorporate vulgar language, expressions, and humour. Nevertheless, for Fabara, more than an attitude taken from punk, rebelliousness was connected with his mestizo origins. For him and his bandmates, the idea behind Rocola Bacalao was to create a musical space not limited by rules and conventionalities. That is why they felt free to shift from traditional music styles such as san juanito to angry punk rock and ska. By embracing traditional elements, Rocola Bacalao challenged white-eurocentric decorum. As one of the most important independent bands of the early 2000s, Rocola Bacalao promoted an alternative way to perform mestizaje from music. In other words, an alternative mestizaje, a defiant mestizaje not ashamed of its mixed origins.

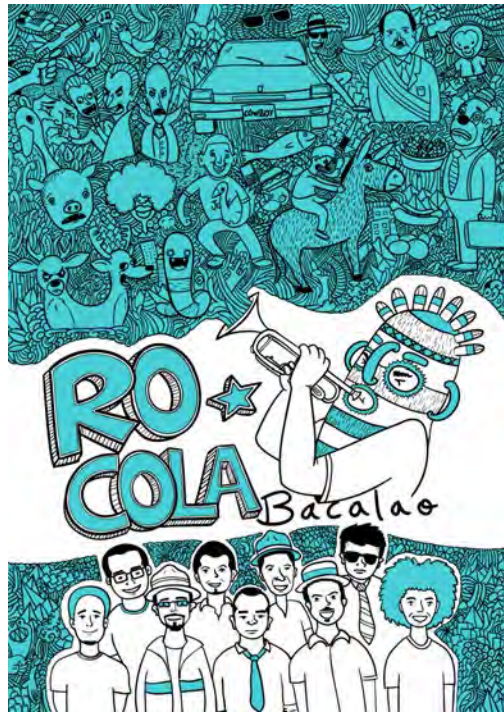


Figure 15. Illustration of La Rocola Bacalao for the Licuadora zine. In the centre, José wears the mask while playing his instrument. Illustrator Daniel Gabela. Retrieved from <https://www.behance.net/gallery/32245399/ILUSTRACION-Rocola-Bacalao>

Curare: The mask on the pit

If a band is responsible for taking the figure of *diablo-huma* and importing it into the mosh pit, that is the self-defined “longo-metal” Curare. The Kichwa word “longo” which in its original meaning refers to a young person, has become a racist insult used among mestizos by remarking indigenous features or showing indigenous or non-white attitudes. Curare’s approach to the word aims to invert its negative connotations. The whole concept of the band seeks to embrace indigenous traditions and mix them with aggressive music. Indeed, Curare moves fluidly from metal and hardcore and different kinds of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Ecuadorian musical traditions.

Most of Curare’s members come from the region *diablo-huma* comes from. The band has often used the image of the *diablo-huma* on their album arts, music videos, event flyers, and merch. For this reason, interviewing them about their perspective over the mask was mandatory.



Figure 16. Daniel Cano, from Curare, playing wearing the diablo-huma mask in Saca el Diablo 2018. Photographer: Juan Pablo Viteri

They first mentioned that the *aya-uma* has been a very familiar character. The band members consider themselves mestizos that happened to grow up in close contact with rural traditions. Connecting their passion for metal music with traditional music was, as they argued, “natural” as both have been part of their everyday experience. However, their appropriation of the *aya-uma* and the meanings they attributed to him evolved to gain political connotations.

When Juan Pablo Rosales (guitar and lead singer) and Eduardo Cando (Andean winds) came to complete their bachelor's degree in Quito at the end of the 1990s, they felt profoundly influenced by the left-wing political movements from Latin America. They then thought of the mask as a kind of ski mask, just like the one that Subcomandante Marcos emblematically wore as part of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) Mexico. For him, the similarities between the masks were so evident that when Café Tacvba⁴⁵ played on Quito in 1997, he came

⁴⁵ Café Tacvba, coming from Mexico, is one of the most prominent Latin American alternative acts.

to the event wearing the mask. Perhaps this was the first time the mask showed up in a live event different from a *fiesta popular*.

For Rosales, just as metal and hardcore are based on questioning the system, in the context of Ecuador and Latin America, embracing indigenous music traditions can be “a political identity exercise” [*un ejercicio político de indentidad*]. It is an exercise based on deconstructing mestizaje and turning it into a decolonial political perspective. Rosales added that indigenous traditions such as fiestas populares and extreme forms of music share a rebellious attitude, which expresses very well in the rituals both of these cultures display.

In my experience, outside of fiesta populares, Curare’s gigs are the events where you would spot the most significant amount of *diablo-humas*, and they concentrate on the mosh pits. The latter is probably one of the most ritualistic aspects of metal and punk rock music cultures. This unique dance has become an essential component of most metal music live events worldwide (Viteri, 2011). As a subcultural form of dance, it has unique connotations. As Richies (2011: 316) argues, the pit is a ritual in which fans “[...] play with darker aspects of existence, subvert normative social conventions, and release pent-up frustrations of mundanity while fostering a strong sense of community.” In that sense, it intends to create a space that operates under its own unique set of rules while current regulations are rejected (Ibíd.: 317).

Accordingly, David Barsallo, former bass player and the first member of Curare who first wore the mask onstage, the *aya-uma* mask is the element that traces a clear parallel between fiesta popular and rock concerts. As cathartic practices, Barsallo asserted that the mask has the power to revive something that is already within yourself:

In wearing it [the mask] onstage, we are taking it to a different context. However, the stage is also a party. Concerts are a celebration, so they are somehow connected with identity. Curare always aimed to re-signify identity, mix things up, and pick up things that are part of our culture but are a bit hidden. People identify with them because you already have them in you. Somehow, since you were a child, you have been spotting these masks. At least for me, that was the case. [*Al llevarles al escenario les sacamos un poco de ese contexto, sin embargo, en el escenario también es una fiesta. Los conciertos también son una celebración, entonces es algo que de cierta forma está conectado, y también la identidad, ¿no? Al menos con Curare siempre tuvimos ese tema de reinterpretar un poco la identidad, de mezclar las cosas, de un poco retomar ciertas cosas que son parte de la cultura y estaban un poco escondidas. Y al sacarlas para afuera, también la gente se identifica con eso. Y también porque ya lo tienes dentro, de cierta*

forma desde niño siempre uno vio las máscaras. Para mí, por ejemplo, yo siempre lo tuve como algo que estaba ahí pero no lo tenía muy presente hasta que se me ocurrió la idea de utilizar la máscara].

Performing a new mestizaje: concluding thoughts

I asked Gabriel Bauman, singer of Swing Original Monks and the author of the lyrics of *Fiesta Popular* to elaborate on what he thinks the *diablo-huma* means in the context of the independent scene. His response encapsulated very well the arguments presented in this chapter, explaining what the *diablo-huma* has come to represent independent artists and its audiences:

I believe that every population and region of the world has always looked for a symbol that identifies it and for which the rest of the world recognizes it. It could be a flag, an animal from the region. Here, *diablo-huma* emerges as a rejection towards the impositions of the Catholic Church. However, young people embrace it in concerts. You are young, and you wear the mask of a devil that allows you to be whatever you want to be. For a moment, you escape the rules and control of adults, the educational system and every set of values that as young people we confront. You become a devil that makes fun of the rest and imposes its own rules. [*Creo que región del mundo, siempre busca un símbolo con el que se pueda identificar, que sea su marco, su sello, por el cual el resto del mundo le pueda reconocer. Puede ser una bandera, un animal que habita esa región que se vuelve el símbolo. Acá el diablo huma nace de este rechazo imposición de la iglesia católica y la juventud lo ha asumido en conciertos de rock u otros tipos de música independientes. Es eso, eres joven y te pones una máscara de diablo que te permite ser, quién quieras ser. Por un momento sales de la rutina y el control de los adultos, la educación, y todos esos valores que como jóvenes enfrentamos. Un diablo como un ser que se burla de todos y pone las reglas. Es una máscara que simboliza el que aquí nosotros hacemos lo que queremos]*

The appropriation of the *diablo-huma* has become a symbol representing the construction of an alternative version – or, in that matter, a reconstruction– of mestizaje and our sense of imagined community as a nation. By definition, the process of consolidating a nation is a homogenising project (Connell & Gibson, 2003:117). It is, in other words, an exercise of power on which the elites create symbols and impose them on the population for disciplinary purposes. However, these symbols could get subverted, re-interpreted, and re-constructed to suit people's affections and ideas.

In Ecuador's case, this project has attempted to erase indigenous traditions or value them only for folkloric aesthetic purposes. However, the evidence presented in this chapter shows that the independent music scene has evolved to become, paraphrasing Rosales's words, "a political exercise of identity" — a re-imagining of the official narrative and the structural racism imposed as cultural logic. In this sense, following Walter Benjamin, Rivera (2010:32) argues that re-interpreting history represents a political strategy that fuels the desire for a different reality. The *aya-uma* in the context of independent music represents a desire to rebel against colonial history and create a new mestizaje.

Diablo-huma's two faces become a metaphor for the conciliation between the indigenous and the mestizo. It becomes a rebellious spirit that questions conventionalities while representing a collapse of the contrasting worlds of modernity and tradition, urban and rural, European and indigenous, global and local. Its multiple colours celebrate the inherent and ever-growing diversity, not the monolithic essential idea of a nation, and tradition as a dead archaeological vestige. The word "*diablo*" [demon] in *diablo-huma* does not negatively represent this scene. Its status as a profane element is embraced and celebrated. In that way, it has become the scene's flagship rethinking its historical origins while finding its voices in the reconnection with its neglected roots.

The turn of the century was a period of innovation in Ecuadorian independent music. Most of this innovation came from introducing elements taken from rural and indigenous traditional Ecuadorian cultures. At the same time, this exploration of tradition has been motivated by the counter-cultural ethos that the rock scene established as the base of Ecuadorian independent music. Nonetheless, the turn of the century was also a period of diversification. New sounds beyond rock music and its derivatives emerged. Hip-hop, electronic, pop, and post-rock acts started emerging. In these styles, as explored in the next chapter, technology has played a crucial role in opening a door for new ways of experimentation, further expanding Ecuadorian independent music.



Figure 17. Diablos-Huma in the crowd at a metal band performance at Quitofest 2016. Photographer: Juan Pablo Viteri

Chapter 6

Independent digital sounds: collapses between tradition and technology in contemporary Ecuadorian music.

The turn of the century represents a period of transformation for Ecuadorian independent music. This scene was synonymous with rock and its derivatives for almost three decades. However, it has expanded towards electronic and digital sounds in the last two decades. Rock remains relevant, but it is now sharing the stage with electronic producers and hip-hop acts. Moreover, digital sounds have permeated rock, incorporating synthesisers, computers, electronic beats, and sampling techniques. Ecuadorian independent music has expanded towards electronic and digital sounds while seeking to uncover the role of tradition in this expansion. More than a stylistic shift, this has empowered the ongoing critical *mestizaje* that rock was already pushing. Thus, rather than dissipating tradition, the expansion towards the digital has sophisticated its exploration enabling a critical posthumanism. That is, explained briefly, a deconstruction of the eurocentric bias (postcolonialism) to the decolonisation of nature and machining beings (posthumanism) (Islam, 2016: 117).

Therefore, it would be a mistake to simply address this incorporation of technological elements as the uncritical following of global trends or a practical and more convenient solution to technical issues in music production. Instead, I focus on how incorporating technologies opens meaningful possibilities for Ecuadorian independent music. As Ross (199:3) suggests, “it is important to assume technology, not as a mechanical imposition on our lives, but as a fully cultural process, soaked through with social meaning”. Accordingly, the aim is to explore digital technologies’ particular meanings and implications in Ecuadorian independent music creation. As Rock was locally adopted to become a critical response to local idiosyncrasies and a way to rethink our *mestizo* upbringing, this chapter explores the specific role digital aesthetics play in generating new meanings and possibilities to a musical *mestizaje*.

Indeed, the argument made here is that this techno-traditional approach has empowered new possibilities. Among them is the use of sampling to re-embody the past for bringing it into the present in a phantasmagoric form. A practice that, following Derrida (2006) and Fisher (2014),

could be described as hauntological. At the same time, the work of artists that have embraced technological aesthetics to become cyborgs. These are machine-human hybrids that expand the biological limits of their mestizo bodies and redefine the collective relationship with neglected cultural heritage and nature.

This argument is made by studying a selection of artists that have been influential in shifting the scene's sound from guitar-based rock to digital sounds. Some of these artists are Can-Can, Marley Muerto, The Swing Original Monks, Mugre Sur, Quixosis, Niebla FM, Los Nin, LaTorre, and Nicola Cruz. This analysis is carried by close readings of their lyrics and styles, informal and formal interviews, and some of my own experiences as a media producer and fan who has witnessed and reported on the scene's transformations and evolution. Nonetheless, before that, it is imperative to discuss the connections between music and technology and how that relationship reflects on postcolonial and posthuman perspectives.

Critical posthumanism as postcolonialism.

Posthumanism and postcolonialism are theoretical perspectives but with conflicting stances towards technology. Braidotti and Wolfe's proposition of a critical posthumanism that questions the man-centred rationalism of humanism and, accordingly, has historically approached technology as a means to master nature is, indeed, informed by postcolonialism. However, unlike postcolonialism, some forms of posthumanism do embrace the liberatory possibilities of "disembodying" and "borderless" existence that new technologies arguably offer (Islam, 2016: 117). These contrasting views parallel imaginaries around modern technologies, which have either viewed machines as means to control and subordinate people while destroying nature or as means of bringing further democratisation and liberation (Punt 2000: 7). Hence, the prevalent tendency in popular culture to portray technology embedded either in dystopic or utopian narratives of the future (Dinello, 2005 & Luisetti, 2016).

In that sense, critical posthumanism and postcolonialism could be considered complementary rather than entirely different lines of thought. Many postcolonial thinkers like Said, Bhabha, and Fanon have certainly influenced posthumanism. Moreover, posthumanism and postcolonialism lean towards deconstructing and decolonising the category human for its eurocentric bias that dehumanises certain groups by remarking biological distinctions. However, critical

posthumanism is more emphatic in arguing for expanding the decolonisation of human relationships to decolonising humans' relationships with non-human beings like animals, ecosystems, and technologies (Islam, 2016). Therefore, to a certain extent, critical posthumanism becomes an extension of postcolonialism with significant differences worth remarking.

Within Global South contexts, the relationship with technology has been historically closer to it as a means of control, destruction, and subordination in the name of progress. Hence, postcolonialism has been relatively more suspicious of technology than posthumanism. Therefore, it is understandable that subaltern groups view technology as an agent of modernisation. A process that postcolonial thinkers argue has been a fraudulent offer of progress that has reinforced colonial relationships. In that regard, making a case for music technologies, Attali (2009:7) argues, "technologies of listening" have "[...] the ability to interpret and control history to manipulate the culture of a people, to channel its violence and hopes."

Consequently, and aware of the continuities and differences between postcolonialism and posthumanism, the aim is to see the relationship between technology, culture, and nature as complex, unfixed, and non-binary. I address technologies as embedded in a world of entanglements and tensions that bring risks of reinforcing unequal power relationships but offer new possibilities to think, imagine, and act. In that sense, following Appadurai (2005), the expansion of technology and media has provoked a world in which global powers keep establishing global hegemonies. However, this does take away the possibility that distances get shrunken, consumers become producers and some of the borders separating the global from the local get blurred (Ibid: 10). In other words, as technology keeps reinforcing forms of oppression, technology can open up opportunities for imagining and executing new forms of resistance and agency.

In that sense, the focus is on technology as it "... become[s] politically charged with conflicting ideologies of identity, community, knowledge and power" (Lysloff & Gay, Jr; 2003: 11). Accordingly, the aim is to reflect on the disruptive use of technology in music creation that empowers a critical *mestizaje*. For that, it is worth reflecting briefly on the relationship between popular music and technology.

Techno-critical strategies from below

The presence of technologies in popular music is relatable to notions of innovation and disruption. In that sense, the use of modern technologies in the music context materialised what Italian futurist Luigi Russolo (2001: 206) announced more than a hundred years ago: a “musical evolution” provoked by the “multiplication of machines”. Indeed, many scholars have remarked on the possibilities that new technologies bring to music production (Blázquez, J. & Morera, O. 2002; Theberge, 2004, Hegarty, 2007). Accordingly, Reynolds (2010:313) asserted that electronic music emerged from the desire to find “the most radical or futuristic-sounding potential in brand new technology”.

Technologies such as analogue and digital synthesis, samplers, and the use of computers as recording and performing tools have, indeed, brought exciting new possibilities for making new forms of music. However, innovation represents a rupture of conventionalities that usually get adverse reactions and resistance. When they are new, technologies are often diminished for only producing noise –in the sense of not being musical enough– and for replacing human skills with mechanical processes (Pearson, 2012). On the other hand, the enthusiasm around technology resonates with positivistic notions of linear progress. However, using technologies in music does not always imply affiliation with eurolinear conceptions of time.

The emerging techno-traditional approach in the scene holds many parallels and similarities with afrofuturism. As a concept, afrofuturism describes the connections between Afro-American cultural legacy and technoculture (Anderson and Jones, 2016). It encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions, but it is particularly prevalent in music. African-American jazz, rock, funk, and pop musicians like Sun Ra, George Clinton, Hendrix, Parliament-Funkadelic, Prince, and hip-hop artists like Outkast, MF Doom, Deltron 3030, and Kendrick Lamar are some of the names often tied to afrofuturism. These acts are defined by cutting-edge aesthetics that often pay tribute to African (American) cultural heritage. In that sense, afrofuturism speaks simultaneously of “a reclamation of the past and a projection into the future and further serves to decontextualize the tenuous confines of time and space” (Mcnally, 2014:2).

The paradoxical nature of afrofuturism resonates with critical posthumanism and postcolonialism. In this sense, afrofuturism and the techno-traditional artists in Ecuador react

against a historical subordination by imagining an emancipated present and future. Or, in other words, a past countered and a future imagined through the means of music and technology.

A prominent example of this mestizo futurism is Franco-Ecuadorian DJ/producer Nicola Cruz who created “Andes Step” – a mix of electronic dance music and Ecuadorian folk traditions. In Cruz's music, modernity collides with tradition, global encounters the local, and nature coexists with technologies. The specialised international press has commented on this aspect of Cruz's music. For instance, Rolling Stone Magazine has remarked upon his ability to channel “ancient folk traditions with a modern-day awareness” (Raygoza, 2019). Likewise, Canadian digital media and broadcasting company Vice described Cruz's sound as “[a] call upon the rituals and natural spaces [his] tracks draw inspiration from all over Ecuador's rich culture, including religious rituals, native rhythms, and a passion for the region's topographic landscapes” (Flores, 2015).

However, Cruz is just the most visible face of a scene of a diverse range of artists exploring local grassroots traditions while playing laptop computers, synths, samples, and all kinds of electronic and digital sound devices. Each of the artists in this chapter, in many ways, enables an encounter between futuristic soundscapes and traditional sounds. Moreover, they are creating a multi-temporal mestizaje that moves forward while engaging with the country's cultural past. Nevertheless, beyond technology, it is worth considering and understanding that the Latin American region has been defined by time and space dualities since its origins.

The dualities of Time and space in Latin America

As argued throughout this thesis, in the Latin American region, tradition, especially when linked to indigenous and African roots, has been in a systematic and constant process of being eliminated, first by the conquest and then by modern cultural imperialism. In that sense, ethnic hierarchies have also become a matter of time perspectives. Tensions between tradition and modernity have been definitive aspects of Latin American culture. Indeed, Canclini (2005) argues that a “multi-temporal heterogeneity” in which colonial and indigenous legacies coexist with European modernity in multiple ways is experienced in most Latin American nations. Throughout the twentieth century, the modernisation of Latin American nations implied an increasing rural-to-urban migration.

As a consequence, a dichotomy emerged. On the one hand, the rural is a place for traditions and the indigenous; thus, the past. On the other, the city is a place for progress and the white elites; therefore, the future. Under this premise, the rural/indigenous/tradition represented everything that had to be left behind to become modern and join progress. Nonetheless, as argued in chapter 1, indigenous and mestizo cultural roots never left and resisted marginalisation by “mixing” with colonial and later modern ideas and practices (Echeverría, 2001; Kingman, 1992).

Nevertheless, Canclini’s ideas about hybridity have been questioned as they may imply that European modernity simply coexists with tradition (Cornejo-Polar, 1997; Kokotovic, 2000; Rivera, 2010). As an alternative, Wade (2005) suggests approaching the hybrid dimension of mestizaje as an unfixed, unsolved, tense, and ever-going process. Tradition and modernity keep colliding and sometimes in problematic ways. Following Benjamin in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, Rivera Cusicanqui (2010: 55) argues that decolonising Latin America is a process that requires re-establishing the Andean conception of time. A perspective that, of course, got lost after the imposition of the lineal notion of progress. After colonisation, Rivera asserts, that survival of the native populations has been a constant struggle for reclaiming contemporaneity. Hence, the re-establishment of the indigenous Andean conception of time could only emerge from the present while making a spiral that continuously feeds back from the past to the future. A “hope principle”, as she describes it, that imagines decolonisation while generating it. Therefore, reviving the past, the forgotten and marginalised has cultural, social, and political connotations that have been a fundamental part of the region’s idiosyncrasy and the base of its cultural survival.

In the first half of the twentieth century, for instance, when European modernism aimed at dismantling traditional art practices, Latin American avant-garde movements did not break ties with the region’s past. On the contrary, prominent regional movements such as Andean indigenismo, Mexican muralismo, and Brazilian antropofagia [cannibalism] defined their unique styles by mixing ideas taken from European movements with marginalised indigenous cultures and the social issues around them. Similarly, as explored in chapter 4, Latin American popular music from the 1950s started a process based on rescuing dying indigenous and rural folk traditions aligned with left-wing political ethos. Likewise, salsa music emerged in the 1970s as a mix of Afro-Caribbean musical roots with modern jazz influences (Pancini Hernandez, 2010). This hybridity has also been present in alternative and independent Latin rock from the 1990s.

Hence, it is safe to argue that creating the new through tradition has been a fundamental and consistent aspect of Latin cultural expressions, an aspect also evident in newer alternative forms of popular music.

Accordingly, Ecuadorian versions of hip-hop, electronic, rock, and pop that incorporate electronic music elements and started emerging in the new millennium could be interpreted as an appropriation of a cutting-edge use of technologies in popular music. An appropriation that, through sampling techniques, the use of synths and digital electronic instruments found means empowering and perpetuating tradition into the future. Nevertheless, this double temporal fluidity of technology is not exclusive to Ecuadorian and Latin American music cultures but other subaltern ones.

Technologies of future-past in contemporary popular music

It would be a mistake to underestimate technology's role in popular music. Electronic amplification, the introduction of tape, and then digital recording, electronic synthesis technologies have been definitive for popular music. Nonetheless, in the last decades, technology has become so prominent that it has been an essential component of widely popular styles of music like electronic and hip-hop. And although technological innovation has often brought new futuristic sounds, that has not always been the case (Hegarty, 2007: 23).

Aesthetics based on the past like "retrophilia" and projections of the future like "sci-fi" are all over popular music (Pepperell & Punt: 45-46). In the same matter, technology's ability to recycle and recombine pre-existing sounds, devices, and techniques have been equally significant (McLeod & Kuenzli, 2011; Navas, 2012). Digital, non-linear editing technologies for sound and image allow both rewinding and fast-forwarding through time. More than practical workflows, these techniques are a metaphor for creation in today's world. The present, in this sense, has become a space-time frame from which we can "manipulate our memories of the past and future, construct our narratives and create our recollections" (Pepperell & Punt, 2000: 43).

Paradoxically, the pursuit of innovation in popular music has not followed a linear path. Sometimes innovation has been achieved by "the misuse, reissue or abuse of instruments,

machinery contexts and practices” (Hegarty, 2007:181). For instance, techniques such as scratching, sampling, and glitching have been definitive for widely popular electronic and hip-hop music styles. Similarly, recycling stuff taken from old music records or incorporating sounds from non-musical sources has often been the basis of some of the most avant-garde popular music (Reynolds, 2012). Referencing or sampling music from predecessor artists has been particularly prevalent in hip-hop culture from its early days to the present. Think, for instance, in Public Enemy, NWO, and, more recently, in Kendrick Lamar. Likewise, the use of non-musical sources like films and televisions is present in the work of critically acclaimed artists like MF Doom or Boards of Canada. In this sense, incorporating non-musical elements represents a way to expand the definition of what counts as musical. Simultaneously, editing, repurposing, and quoting the past has a potential critical drive of countering dominant narratives of history (Navas 2012: 67).

Nonetheless, the fixation with recycling has become a common and overused trend that, in many cases, it is hard to read as anything else beyond shallow nostalgia. Indeed, in "Retromania", Simon Reynolds (2011) elaborates a well-argued critique of this compulsive fixation of current pop music with its past. As technologies such as MP3s and streaming have made music from other eras almost too accessible, new music has become too derivative. Thus, Reynolds questions the capacity of the current pop music to keep being innovative. This argument, which follows Jameson's (1992) critique of postmodern nostalgia, might be a proper way to describe a commercial spectrum of popular music, yet it is still an overgeneralization. Applying the same analysis to Latin American and Afro-American cultures would be short-sighted as it assumes a linear perspective of progress and, consequently, ignores the meaningfulness of tradition for these cultures.

Nostalgia for the historically subordinated experiences of indigenous and African diaspora populations is a wistful affection for a past that has struggled not to be erased. In this sense, these technological approaches to the past and future have the potential to counter the notion of "real-time" or "Euro-linear time" (McLead 2016: 109).

As I have asserted in the previous chapters, independent Ecuadorian music is a mostly mestizo context with problematic relationships with indigenous and black cultural heritage. Therefore, re-connection with tradition from the local rock culture became an ethos of this music scene. Furthermore, it has been an aspect that evidences the decolonisation of mestizo culture. As

more digital tools became available and affordable in the last two decades, the interest in exploring the local cultural heritage through modern global styles has only intensified and transcended rock. Hence, in the following section, I reflect on the emblematic bands and artists that have shaped this technophilic facet of the independent scene. I aim to reflect on the complex, paradoxical but exciting relationship between technology, time, and decolonisation in the independent Ecuadorian scene. A relationship that, as asserted, is postcolonial and posthuman at the same time.

Beyond rock: hauntology and the emerging postcolonial subjectivity of Ecuadorian independent music

Sound is a present absence; silence is an absent present. Or perhaps the reverse is better: sound is an absent presence; silence is a present absence?

(Toop, 2011:vii)

Distorted guitars, fast rhythms, screams for justice, and mosh-pits became the context in which tradition thrived in Ecuadorian independent music. This hybrid configuration of rock and tradition became a strategy to counter the dominant colonial paradigms in Ecuadorian society. Entering the 2010s, however, a new wave of independent artists started approaching tradition not only from rock but from electronic music and hip-hop aesthetics. Gradually, laptop computers, synths, and midi controllers became as common as guitars, basses, and drums. Metal bands playing Andean wood instruments started sharing the scene with artists using cybernetic technologies to modify voices and sampling old recordings of traditional melodies and rhythms. Digital aesthetics coexisting with the purely organic, tradition with the avant-garde, and the past with the future keep emerging. And thus, it became pretty evident that during this decade, the most cutting-edge acts of the scene, the ones using digital music instrumentations, were also the ones that have been more interested in exploring tradition.

As the previous section argued, music technologies have allowed new sounds and have contributed to constantly extending the definitions of what counts as music. However, music production technologies have not always looked for the new. They have also been used to

reference, reuse, and remix the past. Invoking or resurrecting what seems to be gone or not yet present is one of contemporary popular music's most interesting abilities.

A term that has come to reflect and explain the implications of the paranormal potentialities of technologies is hauntology. Mcleod (2016: 119) asserts Hauntology is “often tied to notions of retrofuturism or techno-nostalgia whereby artists evoke the past typically by employing the spectral sounds of old music technologies”. Accordingly, Reynolds (2011:328) and Fisher (2014) use it to describe electronic music acts such as Burial and Ghost Box Label and critique today’s popular music nostalgic tendencies. Past and future, in this regard, become haunted presences; they “no longer” exist or have “not yet” happened. Thus, following the critiques of Reynolds and Fisher, the invocation of the past and futures that never became in today’s popular culture could be read as a linearity rupture of time that operates as a loop that prevents evolution from happening.

However, my argument is that the same logic is incompatible with Latin American contexts as past and future have different connotations. Colonialism which continued in capitalism, has attempted to erase or force the break of ties with the region's pre-colonial pre-late capitalism past. In this sense, more than the lack of creativity, reconnecting with certain pasts could represent a strategy for breaking the continuum of colonialism and cultural imperialism. The invocation of the past could become, in this sense, a sign of resistance rather than a denial of evolution towards the future. After all, there could not be a specific notion of the present or a future if the links with the past are broken.

A selection of artists and albums that reflect the evolution of the intersections between music, technology, and tradition in contemporary independent music follows. This curation includes early adopters of new technologies that expand rock to post-rock and the diversity of techno-mestizo acts bringing innovation through the technological exploration of local traditions. In this sense, the aim is to show how the newest Ecuadorian scene expands how traditions are embraced and performed in the 21st century.

Entering the digital: *Malditos Villanos Pixelados*, nostalgia and technology in Ecuadorian independent Music

The 2000s were years of changes and transitions for the independent Ecuadorian scene. The scene started producing more diverse and eclectic styles beyond the conventionalities of rock music. Can-Can was one of the bands that emerged and pushed the scene towards new ideas. Their homonymous first album (2002) and its follower, *Malditos Villanos Pixelados* [*Damn Pixelated Villains*] (2004), introduced a soft but experimental pop-rock sound in a context dominated by distorted electric guitars and an aggressive rebel attitude. The tone of the lyrics was somewhat reflective, nostalgic, and existential. In a scene dominated by men, the band presented a woman, Denisse Santos, as their lead singer. However, the most differentiating aspect of Can Can was its use of electronic elements such as samples, synths, vocoders, and digital ambient effects, introduced by Daniel Pasquel, producer, guitarist, and band's leading composer.

I remember that the experience of listening to *Malditos Villanos Pixelados* for the first time was baffling and intriguing at the same time. It certainly was very different from everything else produced here. The album contains 18 tracks, six of which are songs. The remains are electronic music interludes that often include bits taken from local radio like football games commentaries and political discourses. These samples feel randomly picked and give the impression of being taken zapping through the radio. It is a musical pastiche made of electronic interludes, guitar riffs, nostalgic lyrics, processed voices, and random radio bits. Altogether, all these elements transmit a sensation of being lost or looking for something but not knowing what that is. The chorus of the album's most iconic track, "UJO" (acronym for Quito, Ecuador's capital), literally exclaims "*porque en UJO no encuentro a nadie, porque en UJO no deseo a nadie*" ["because in UJO I find no one, because in UJO I desire no one"]. Yearning and existential feelings are exacerbated by allusions to vintage video games and obsolete tech. Two of the songs are named Atari and Nintendo, which also explains the album's name.

Consequent to the nostalgic and schizophrenic tone of the *Malditos Villanos Pixelados*, a cover of *Fatalidad*, a pasillo song written in the 1950s and made famous by Julio Jaramillo –arguably the most celebrated Ecuadorian singer of all time– is introduced. At first, I thought it was a weird addition to the album. Then I realised it made sense. Pasillo is a profoundly melancholic and nostalgic style often assumed to be a prominent representative of Ecuadorian culture (Wong,

2010). However, Can Can's cover did not seek to produce a faithful version of the original song. The cover introduced sound elements such as synthesizers, and digitally processed electric guitars replaced the Spanish acoustic guitar of the original version. The result is subtle but ambiguous as it mixes a nostalgic aura with futuristic sounds. Can Can's *Fatalidad* thus insinuated that the past could coexist with the digital.

Can Can was certainly pushing the boundaries of what the scene understood as rock, but it was not alone in that regard. Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, the band collaborated and shared the stage with two bands representing this interest in expanding rock to new territories in contrasting ways. One of them was Mamá Vudú, one of the scene's most emblematic and innovative independent rock bands, which eventually experimented with electronic elements. The other was Guardarraya, an electro-acoustic ensemble that references Spanish guitar-based folk Ecuadorian styles with a modern vibe.

This interest in re-thinking rock shown by these three bands was parallel to tendencies in the global rock stage around the turn of the century. That was a period in which the essence of rock, fixated on power guitars and drums, moved to incorporate elements from "electronic studio-based music such as techno and hip-hop", which Reynolds (2009:186) described as post-rock. However, the turn of the century was also when rock started looking at the past as Anglo-American alternative rock was reviving folk and country traditions (Reynolds, 2009:28). In this sense, Can Can, Mama Vudú, and Guardarraya could be considered Ecuadorian versions of the Anglo-European post and pre-rock tendencies.

Marley Muerto: remixing temporalities

After *Malditos Villanos Pixelados*, Can Can's next albums evolved into a relatively less experimental electronic pop-rock sound until the band went on an eight-year hiatus starting 2012. That same year Can Can's leader, Daniel Pasquel, released his solo project called Marley Muerto with the album *Paramar*. This project –for which Pasquel performed wearing a skull-like mask made from a disco ball, embodying an alien-like character– was based on collaborating with radically different local artists. As described in Marley Muerto's Spotify profile, these collaborations were achieved using sampling techniques, distance collaborations, and co-productions: a strategy that allowed the mix of a wide variety of elements from radically different music cultures. *Paramar*, indeed, makes for a highly eclectic listening experience. Each of the tracks is performed by a diverse group of artists from various global, regional, and local

styles like salsa, Andean folk music, shoegaze, pop, and bossanova. The glue that holds the album together is the futuristic aesthetic provided by digital technology and Pasquel's skills as a producer.

Another important aspect of the album worth mentioning is its ability to integrate music that represents different generations. Some of the artists featured were young emerging artists like Sexores, Swing Original Monks, Da Pawn, and Mariela Condo, but others like Orquesta Los Chigualeros, Grupo Illiniza, or Hugo Idrovo were already artists with decades of trajectory. In this sense, the album fluidly moved in between or collapsed traditional and modern sounds. This melting pot of artists resonates with the hybrid nature of the mestizo Latin American cultures that Canclini (2005) defined as a mixture of temporalities.

Reference and reflections on time show up throughout the album. For instance, on its first single, "*Tren*" [train] with a highly digitally processed voice, Pasquel sings, "We all wish to travel to the past. Everything I owned I found is destroyed" ["*Todos deseamos viajar al pasado. Todo lo que tuve lo veo destrozado*"]. These words could be a personal affirmation in the album's context, but it connects with broader cultural constructs. It speaks of a desire to travel in time to recover something that we have collectively lost. These sentiments are even clearer in *El antídoto* [the antidote] – a track that features the Swing Original Monks, the self-proclaimed "band that mixes all"; Orquesta Los Chigualeros, a Caribbean son orchestra with a base in Afro-Ecuadorian music traditions; and the local salsa ensemble, La Mala Maña.

"*El antídoto*" is probably the track that best represents the whole spirit of the album. It speaks of cultural encounters, dialogues, and interactions that move across time. In it, the Afro-Ecuadorian voices of Los Chigualeros sing, "I lend you my soul / I lend you my voice / And the sound of my drum is the antidote" [*Te presto mi alma, te presto mi voz. Y el sonido de mi tambor, es el antídoto*]. To what Monk's lead singer replays: "They've tainted my skin white / but they've missed something / an infiltrated black brush / Metamorphosis is now accomplished" [*Mi piel tiñeron de blanco pero de algo se han olvidado / De ver un pincel negro infiltrado / La metamorfosis se ha efectuado*]. This interaction speaks of mestizaje, which does not work as a whitening project but as a celebration of the corporeal mixture between two different Latino cultures: black and mestizo. Accordingly, the song's electronic salsa and bossa pop elements speak of a new musical mestizaje detached from colonialism and composed of the collapse of tradition and technology.

In the same tone, the song keeps making connections between tradition concerning race, blood, and skin colours, but it also speaks of it as phantasmagorical spectrums like souls and spirits. In other moment, Los Chigualeños sing “To prevent death for staying in the closet/ hanging living its calvary/ For the snake bite in the mind/ It is the antidote for pain/ what runs in my veins is not blood/ / Listen, it is my voice” [*Para que la muerte no se quede en el armario/ Colgada viviendo su calvario/ Para la picadura de la serpiente en la mente/ Es el antídoto para el dolor/ Lo que corre por mis venas/ no es sangre escucha es mi voz*]. Tradition here is evoked as an immaterial spectrum that manifests through sound, and through sound, it can possess the flesh. Marley Muerto becomes a medium through which the spirits of the past enter into the living realm.

Quixosis and the resurrection of tradition

In the last decade, an electronic scene of DJs and electronic producers experimenting with traditional sounds has been thriving in the Ecuadorian scene. Despite being discreetly popular locally, this wave of artists has received international recognition at regional and global scales. One of the most exciting acts among the new wave of techno-traditional producers is Quixosis by Daniel Lofredo Rota. Quixosis stands out among all electronic producers experimenting with traditional sounds because of his unique background story.

In an article published by The New York Times in 2016, entitled *Found in Ecuador: A Time Capsule for the Ears*, Lofredo Rota tells the story of how in 2014, after the death of his grandfather, he inherited from him an archive of master tapes containing old Ecuadorian national music (Bernas, 2016). It turns out that in the 1940s, Carlos Rota, his grandfather, was the founder of a local label called Caife, which suddenly disappeared in the 1970s. Lofredo Rota digitised, sampled, and incorporated the tapes into his electronic productions with the tapes on his hands. But, more importantly, he started inquiries to find out more about Caife and what it represented for the history of Ecuadorian music.

Caife became the home of important names in Ecuadorian music like the Duo Benitez y Valencia, the Mendoza Suasti sisters, Olga Gutiérrez, and Héctor Bonilla. The label also documented indigenous music launching compilations such as the *Ñucanchi Llactapac Tuna* series. In this matter, Caife’s significance for that moment of Ecuadorian traditional music was

not discrete. The names of artists who made its catalogue indicate that the label had played a key role in shaping one of the most celebrated periods of Ecuadorian traditional music known as “*época de oro*” [golden age]. In addition to this, Lofredo Rota (2019) argued that Caife was not only about launching hits. It was somewhat interested in promoting a sort of musical nationalism in a way that could become progressive, for it did not diminish or exclude indigenous artists or music (Viteri, 2020).

However, in the 1970s, in part for the increasing penetration of foreign forms of music such as tropical styles like cumbia, merengue, salsa, and other international genres such as rock, disco music, and even *nueva canción* ended up displacing Ecuadorian national music from its local popularity (Wong, 2010: 89). In this context, Caife closed, leaving behind a collection of tapes with unidentified and obscure titles, composers, and interpreters. Forty years after the label closed doors, the anonymity and obscurity of these tapes motivated Lofredo Rota to find out who the artists of these unnamed and obscure recording artists were (Figure 18). Moreover, he felt inspired to revive a moment that represents a hidden chapter in Ecuadorian music from the perspective of the newer generations.



Figure 18. Portrait of Lofredo Rota in his home studio. Next to him, his turntables and the tape recorder he has been using to digitise the Caife archive. Photograph by Juan Pablo Viteri

Lofredo Rota's efforts were not in vain. In 2019, the British label Honest Jon's took notice of Caife because of the New York Times article and decided to contact him to agree to re-launch a curation of the titles. For the electronic producer, this became an opportunity to revive the celebrated titles of the label and resurrect the obscure titles that were underappreciated or never saw the light after they were recorded. The distribution of the Caife through Honest Jon's would be the first time a global audience will access this episode of Ecuadorian music — an episode in which Rota (2019) asserts traditional Ecuadorian music achieved its most glorious moment. However, the fact that Caife's became irrelevant when imported music styles became available in the country reveals something significant about Ecuadorian idiosyncrasy towards its cultural heritage.

In her study of Ecuadorian national music, Wong (2011) asserts that diminishing indigenous, African, or vulgar traces has been one of the most prevalent attitudes in Ecuadorian society, especially in its elites. Ironically, a new generation of artists is tracing connections with a past

hidden by the prevalence of a shameful and elitist type of *mestizaje*. This way, when Daniel Lofredo Rota digitalised and then sampled these tapes, he did more than embrace creating something original; he welcomed the chance to revive a forgotten and neglected chapter in the country's collective memory. The case of Quixosis and Lofredo Rota reveal technology's capacity for re-connection with the past, that is, technology's supernatural power of invoking the absent and resurrecting the dead. In this matter, techniques such as sampling and remixing could indeed become "the musical art of ghost coordination and ghost arrangement" (Reynolds 2011 pp. 313-314).

Sampling the past, remixing colonisation and the politics of 21st-century Ecuadorian hip-hop

The noise of the needle touching the vinyl followed by the voice of Jorge Enrique Adoum exclaiming the title of his 1964 poem *Yo me fui con tu nombre por la tierra* [I left carrying your name around the world] is the sample that introduces the 2009 song *Asnos Caso* by the hip-hop group, Mugre Sur⁴⁶. Adoum wrote the poem after he was exiled for questioning the dictatorial regime that ruled the country during that time. In that manner, as usual in Adoum's work, the poem was a critique of the corruption, authoritarianism, and colonialism prevalent in Ecuador of those years. Mugre Sur, on the other hand, is one of the most prominent representatives of the Ecuadorian hip-hop scene. The group's name is in itself a statement of what represents being South American. Still, it is also an allusion to the side of the city the group comes from: the south, a sector which not coincidentally happens to be the most working-class.

Asnos Caso as pronounced means "obey us", but the correct spelling of that expression would be "haznos caso". "*Asnos*" which is pronounced very similarly to "*haznos*", actually means "donkeys", so the title of the song is in itself a game of words for insulting the authorities. Accordingly, *Asnos Caso* combines elements that make for a sharp critique of the government and a class-conscious valorisation of what it means to be Ecuadorian in the twenty-first century.

The inclusion of the phantasmagoric voice of Adoum pronouncing the poem's title on repeated occasions opens a dialogue between the dead poet and the group. Perhaps the most

⁴⁶ I opened the introduction of this thesis with this example, but at the risk of repeating myself, I considered it appropriate to reflect a bit more on the song as it accurately represents the idiosyncrasy of Ecuadorian hip-hop.

emblematic moment of the song comes when another sample of Adoum's voice appears again. This time, the poet exclaims, "no one knows where my country is located" [*nadie sabe donde queda mi país*]. The phrase repeats several times until it is interrupted by one of the members of Mugre Sur, who suddenly and aggressively reacts to the words by saying, "in the south of the world, motherfucker" [*en el sur del mundo, concha de tu madre*]. By sampling Adoum's voice, Mugre Sur echoed Adoum's critique while revealing that the poet's words are still relevant almost half a century later. However, Mugre Sur's critique is not a poem; it is a hip-hop song that uses slang and street language. As the group mentions in one of its rhymes, "bringing down theory to a street dialect".

Following the sharp critique of the *Asnos Caso* lyrics and the use of Adoum voice, the music video presents an irreverent appropriation of aesthetics of State propaganda. In 2014, the Ecuadorian government launched the worldwide advertisement campaign "All You Need is Ecuador". The aim of it was to incentivise international tourism. The title and the music used in the campaign used the melody of "All you need is love" by The Beatles. The investment was huge. A thirty-second clip premiered during the 2015 Super Bowl half-time show (Thompson, 2015). The clip, as expected, was full of cliches showing the wonderful natural scenery of the country, its old colonial architecture, and its exotic people and places.

Of course, Mugre Sur reacted to this idealised and deceiving representation of the country by presenting the exact opposite. For the video, the group stole the font used in the campaign to write with it the song's chorus: "*Rebelaté, asnos asnos caso*" [Rise up against, obey, obey us] (Figure 19). By this, Mugre Sur appropriated the aesthetics of the State propaganda to make a critique that counters the romanticised and washed representation of the country. At the same time, the lyrics denounce a somewhat fragmented society ashamed and tired of their authoritarian leaders.



Figure 19. On the left is a frame taken from one of the clips of the “All you need is Ecuador” campaign. On the right is a frame of the “asnos Caso” music video using the same font style of the campaign. Behind the text, a stilt walker burning the flag of the United States in a street protest.

Mugre Sur is an emblematic and prominent representative of the local hip-hop and independent scene. The group has been pushing local hip-hop music for almost two decades by constantly bringing intelligent and creative lyrics that make sharp comments on racism, political corruption, and classism. Another distinctive feature is the sophistication of the visual elements used in their live performances and music videos which, besides being eye-catching, are meaningful. However, Mugre Sur is not the only representative of the independent hip-hop scene dialoguing with the past and countering colonisation.

Hip-hop as decolonisation accurately describes the most prominent names in Ecuadorian hip-hop: Los Nin. However, tradition is not the past but an integral part of their everyday life for this band. Formed in 2008 and representing the indigenous town of Otavalo, Los Nin are known for being the first fully indigenous hip-hop act in the scene. They use hip-hop as a vehicle for celebrating heritage. The group’s rhymes, charged with rebelliousness, switch between Spanish and Kichwa. Likewise, besides the conventional use of electronic beats and scratch, their sound incorporates rock’s distorted guitars and traditional Andean wind instruments like quenenas and rondadores.

Despite having more than 12 years performing in local and international stages, Los Nin has only produced one album, *Wambra Katary*, launched in 2017. In the 14 tracks that make the album, the group evidences that hip-hop is the subaltern’s language. Their lyrics dignify their indigenous heritage, counter capitalism and colonialism, and promote a united Latin American message. They are a politically charged project that embodies a cosmopolitanism in which mixtures are embraced, and any sense of borders is rejected. As their song, *Americanos* expresses: “If we are Americans we will be one song/ with our fist in the air following the beat of one heart/ Even if they cover our eyes nothing passes us by/ What does it mean to call yourself American?/ Americans are all of us on this side/ Not only the ones that put themselves on the top of the map.” [*Si somos americanos seremos una sola canción/ Con el puño en lo alto al ritmo de un solo corazón/ Por más que nos tapen los ojos nada se nos escapa/ Al decirse*

americanos de qué diablos se trata?/ Americanos somos todos de este lado/ No solamente los que se pusieron en la cima de un mapa].

A third and final prominent example within the local scene of hip-hop is Guanaco. In 2018, this soloist, who has been mixing hip-hop with traditional Latin American and Ecuadorian since 2002, launched a single entitled *Cholonización*. This title is a play of words that subverts the meaning of the word “colonización”, adding the letter “h” to make it sound like the word “cholo”. In Ecuador, “cholo” is a derogatory adjective used to mark something or someone as inferior for being working-class or showing indigenous attributes. That way, the word “cholo” mixed with “colonización” subverts the meaning of colonisation and destigmatises the meaning of *cholo*.

Guanaco’s counter-colonisation approach also shows up in the way he uses technology for making music, as he explained: “Besides a racial mestizaje, [cholinización], also deals with a cross of boundaries between technologies, combining an Andean bass drum with an 808 [drum machine], or playing a long sanjuanito rhythm with a Casio piano. [*Además del mestizaje de razas, también tiene que ver con los cruces con la tecnología, de combinar un bombo andino con un 808, o de usar un piano Casio con un ritmo sanjuanito.*]” This way, Guanaco’s music approaches modern tech elements not for modernising the sound but for the exact opposite. More than a mere aesthetic appropriation, Guanaco approaches these technologies as means to re-embrace the mestizo heritage critically. Indeed, in an interview on the motivations behind his 2018 single “*cholonización*”, the artists expressed:

For me, it is equally vital to make a statement on my spirituality, which is also deeply mestiza and pagan. It is a mix between what they thought of me and what I choose to believe [...] It is different when they colonize you, and they force their ideas into you. [*Para mí también es importante dejar presente mi espiritualidad, que es, también, súper mestiza y súper pagana. Es un mix de lo que me inculcaron con lo que me da la gana de creer [...] Es diferente de cuando te colonizan y te meten a la fuerza las cosas*] (Bayas, 2018).

Towards the posthuman: cannibal cyborgs and the supernatural qualities of the new Ecuadorian independent music

Until this point, I have reflected on how new music technologies serve the purpose of invoking the past as an immaterial presence. This hauntological approximation has, in many ways, responded to an agency that aims to decolonise notions of mestizaje. Nonetheless, the postcolonial agency of these technologised acts has not been mere rhetoric, imaginary, or, in that matter, immaterial. In many ways, the coexistence and collapse of tradition and modernity enabled by digital music technologies have implications that involve bodily experiences.

Technology has been proposed as an extension of the body for overcoming the limits of its biological nature and, at some point, started enabling communications that transcend time and space (McLuhan, 2001). Likewise, digital technologies have come to allow virtual and, in that sense, disembodied forms of interactions (Islam, 2016: 117). Most of the arguments that I have been making in this chapter focus on a rhetorical capacity of reviving the past, making it manifest into the present while generating futuristic aesthetics. This ability speaks of a supernatural resurrection of obscure and forgotten sounds that find a vehicle for achieving transcendence in technology. However, the past, tradition, and history may appear to be merely spectral when music technologies bring them, but they are at the same time bodily experiences. As McNally (2014:9), reflecting on the meaning of afrofuturism asserts, "History cannot be undone, but it can be uncovered and understood in a way that allows marginalized bodies to reappropriate their oppressed pasts".

Mateo Kingman⁴⁷ and LaTorre are representatives of a new wave of artists that demonstrate that in a musical context, tradition is not only being sampled and repurposed through technological means, but the body is also embracing it. As I will demonstrate, in these cases, the mix of electronic aesthetics with tradition these artists propose transcends the virtuality that digital technologies imply. The resurgence of the past in their music is not only channelled by technology but by their flesh. In other words, their music could represent a collapse of the artificial sound coming from digital devices with the organic generation of sounds produced by their own body. In that sense, tradition is not only invoked as a ghost; it becomes a spirit that speaks through their flesh.

Nonetheless, ideas of (re)appropriation of culture as embodiment are not new in the Latin American context. They could be traced back to early Latin American avant-gardes. In the early twentieth century, the emerging modernist movements of the region were looking to create a sense of originality, parallel to a critical understanding of Latin Americanism that could at the same time be modernist (García Canclini, 2005). Such is the Brazilian cannibalist movement proposed by Mario Andrade in 1928 in one of the most significant manifestos of the region. In it, Andrade came up with the metaphor of cannibalism, implying an act of eating the coloniser seeking the digestion of the foreign as an act of incorporating the coloniser's knowledge and spirit into the Latin artists' flesh:

Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy. That he may be transformed into a totem. The human adventure. Earthly finality. Only the pure elites, however, succeeded in cannibalising the flesh, which bears with it the highest meaning of life and avoids all of the catechistic evils identified by Freud. What takes place is not a sublimation of sexual instinct. It is the thermometric scale of the cannibal instinct. Which moves from carnal to elective and creates friendship. Affective, love. Speculative, science. (Andrade, 1999)

⁴⁷ A couple of weeks after I wrote the first draft of this chapter, Mateo Kingman was denounced by some of his ex-couples for psychological and physical abuse. Some months have passed, and I have been reflecting on whether I should keep him on this thesis or just keep the writing as it was. I decided to go for the latter and add this note for many reasons. First of all, I do not consider this the right place to debate the pertinence of cancel culture. However, I do consider that personal issues do affect the perception of the artist's art. That happened to me after the accusations became public, and if I had heard of them before this chapter, I would not have written about Kingman's music. Since I did write about him, I decided to keep the text for its original intention was not to promote Kingman but to reflect on what he has done artistically. The accounts I offer about his work aim to point out the possibilities of new forms of *mestizaje* and the use of digital music technologies, which go beyond his persona. At the same time, also consider reading these assertions through the coda I added at the end of the chapter, reflecting on the dangers and complexities of appropriating subalternity.

Absorbing the culture of others, as expressed by Andrade, is what preceded the creation of hybrid artistic objects that mixed the indigenous and the European. Following that logic, artists are configuring themselves as mestizx artists in reincarnating tradition. However, their approach could be a double-way cannibalism. That is cannibalism in which mestizx bodies are not only absorbing the culture of the Anglo-Europeans but are (re)embodying the indigenouslyness that defined them as mestizo beings. Nonetheless, their approach to technology is not as merely technological and not only organic either. In that sense, a proper way to define Kingman and LaTorre would be as human and machine hybrids or cyborgs.

In her political proposal for cyborg identities, Donna Haraway (1991) argued for the imminence of a technological future in which it becomes possible to escape essentialist notions of identity and humanity. At the core of her claims was the idea of a cyborg, a hybrid constitution of human and machine, “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway:149). In that regard, technology could become a device to re-imagine and dismantle, fix ethnocentric and anthropocentric notions of humanity. Or as McNally (2014: 26) asserts,

The cyborg body can thus be the field on which the complexities of constructed identity are played out. The mix of organic and man-made, nature and nurture, serves to question the concept of what is human and what is decidedly Other.

Cyborg identities, in that regard, resonate with the techno-critical mestizaje of this scene. The hybrid composition of technology and the organic is, in that way, parallel to other forms of hybridities that collapse past and future, euro-modernity and Latinx traditions, the indigenous and the Anglo-European. Therefore, the mutual constitution of machines and body fits the collective generation of a new mestizx consciousness that Anzaldúa (1987: 78) described as the “coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference”. Hence, in the following section, I reflect on Kingman and LaTorre through the lens of a cyborg-mestizaje.

Religar: Decoding Mateo Kingman

In later years, Mateo Kingman became one of the most promising Ecuadorian artists. His fusion of traditional Ecuadorian influences with hip-hop and electronic pop has transcended internationally. In fact, in 2019, Kingman gained the attention of multi-award-winning Argentine producer Gustavo Santaolalla with whom the artist collaborated in the song “*Último Aliento*” [last breath]. Back in 2017, I invited Kingman to give a talk about his approach to tradition. The artist

made an elaborate recount of how his upbringing led him to find a connection between electronic forms of production, traditional forms of music, and his mestizo heritage.

Despite coming from Quito, Kingman spent part of his childhood and teenage years in Macas, a town in the Ecuadorian rainforest. This background brought him closer to the Shuar indigenous community and their culture, an experience that made a profound impact on his spirituality and music. Kingman started fusing Amazonian instruments with hip-hop beats and other instruments like guitar and piano as a teenager. When he moved back to Quito in 2012, he explored other traditional music cultures from the Andean and Afro-Ecuadorian cultures. In this process, he met Ivis Flies, a recognised producer who had made a name for producing pop music fused with Ecuadorian traditions.

A definitive moment for Kingman happened when Flies invited him to work on a project entitled *De Taitas y Mamas* [From Fathers and Mums]. This project was a collection of recordings and a book focused on documenting and collecting music and knowledge from prominent indigenous, Afrodescendant, and mestizo traditional musicians such as Julian Tucumbi, Tres Marías, Papa Roncon, and Mishqui Chullumbu. Kingman asserts that this experience allowed him to interact with master indigenous and black musicians directly, motivating him to explore traditional sounds further. An exploration that eventually gave birth to his solo project and EVHA, a band he formed with fellow musicians Alejandro Mendoza and Renata Nieto, later started LaTorre.

Kingman asserted that exploring traditional music is becoming a quest for reconnecting and redefining his mestizo identity as an urban mestizo. Reflecting on the movement of emerging artists that explore traditions he represents, Kingman mentioned,

We are getting close to what we are as mestizos, a mix of many things. We're starting to accept many influences and cultures are crossing us and as we re-encounter this and have curiosity about what they mean we are allowing ourselves to create music in a different level [*Nos estamos acercando a los que somos como mestizos y aceptando que somos la mezcla de muchas cosas. Estamos empezando aceptar que estamos atravesados por muchas influencias y culturas y mientras nos reencontremos con esto y tengamos una curiosidad por lo que significan, nos estamos permitiendo crear música en otro nivel*]. (Kingman, 2017)

Such a quest for a new and critical resignification of mestizaje has transferred clearly into his music. For instance, in his song “*Religar*” [to relink] the first single for Astro, his second album, Kingman expresses a desire to re-encounter neglected aspects of culture to re-appropriate them and build a new sense of identity. As the song tells:

relink as rearrange
rearrange as relocate
relocate the ground for
stepping and find something
again
Find love again after the
storm...
back to give
back to resist
back to the earth
new skin is to keep going
to relink

[*religar de reacoplar*
reacoplar de reubicar
reubicar el suelo pa' pisar y volver a
encontrar
volver a volver a amar luego de la
tempestad...
volver a volver a dar
volver a volver a dar guerra
volver a volver a la tierra
nueva piel es continuar /
religar...] (Kingman, 2019)

“To re-link”, thus, represents for Kingman a process of transformation and an attempt to achieve transcendence paradoxically rooted and moved by the past. It speaks of a will to embrace the indigenous side of our mestizo collective body and counter the colonial ethos in which urban mestizos are raised. Moreover, re-linking is an affective determination that Ahmed would explain as form “...to account for the historical determination of his white body as the body which becomes home: the body that comes to matter through the reduction of other bodies to matter out of place” (Ahmed, 2000:52).

In discussions involving concepts such as cyborgs or technologically enhanced humans (transhumanism), there is always a risk of falling into a determinism that insinuates that the advent of things entirely relies on technology. This sort of celebratory argument could easily reflect an embracement of Euro-modernity and its promise of progress through modernisation. In that regard, Kingman explained that he instead sees technology as a vehicle to embrace further or expand to tradition, but the process is not wholly dependent on it:

[...] There are many factors in technology that allow us to take tradition to new routes, new paths. However, tradition in Ecuador hasn't been explored to a level in which we can say that we have digested these styles and have created new

sounds and colours through them. [...*hay muchísimos factores de la tecnología que nos permiten llevar esta tradición hacia un nuevo camino, nuevos rumbos, pero creo que la tradición en el Ecuador no ha sido explorada a tales profundidades que podamos decir, ya hemos comido estos géneros y podemos llevarlos hacia nuevos colores y sonoridades*] (Kingman, 2017)

In other words, while technology facilitates the inclusion, a reconnection with the past, the process is not complete until it allows, paraphrasing the words of many of his songs, to shed the old skin and exhibit the new one. Kingman, moreover, argues that mestizos have indeed started that process. We are re-connecting, but we have not just yet become that new being, that new body.

Technology and the artist's body work in complementary ways. Under these arguments, it makes sense that in Kingman's music, cybernetic sounds coexist with the sounds of nature, references to mythological animals, outer space travel, and spiritual journeys. As Reynolds reflecting on the emergence of post-rock argued:

[...] perhaps the really provocative area for future development lies not in cyber rock but cyborg rock; not the wholehearted embrace of techno's methodology, but some kind of interface between real-time, hands-on playing and the use of digital effects and enhancement. As Kevin Martin points out: 'Even in the digital age, you still have a body. It's the connection between "techno" and "Animal" that's interesting.' (Reynolds, 2010:192)

LaTorre: being eternal

The golden age (*época dorada*) of Ecuadorian music was a period that started in the 1930s. It introduced most of the renowned and emblematic compositions of Ecuadorian national music. It was also a moment of in-depth exploration of local music traditions executed by mestizo academic musicians and ethnomusicologists motivated to produce compositions that portray Ecuadorian culture as a true mestizo nation (Mullo, 2009: 33). Aware of that, Renata Nieto and Alejandro Mendoza created LaTorre, a project based on expanding *época dorada* to nowadays sonorities (Jaramillo, 2018).

This way, LaTorre departs from the fixation on the ancestral and indigenous and focuses on the purely mestizo, which defines her heritage and what inspired the music nationalism that

motivated the golden age. Likewise, the sound of LaTorre does not sample old recordings or use traditional instruments. Very little is a mechanical reproduction of the past. Most of the traditional elements in this project are executed by Nieto's body or are played with digital instruments.

In this manner, this project brings elements that feel futuristic but with a heartfelt resonance to the past — a well-balanced coupling of synthetic and organic elements in which Nieto's voice primarily creates a reminiscence of the past. Her singing style embodies the emotion of traditional styles like pasillos and yaravies. However, although Nieto's voice sounds straightforward, there are moments in which it goes through delay effects or is synthetically harmonised and sampled to create layers of voices with different pitches. Occasionally, her singing is reproduced like an echo but with an extremely low pitch that sounds non-human. The manipulation of Nieto's voice sounds as coming out of a supernatural being.

In the video for the project's first single, Temporal, Nieto is shown as some kind of goddess. Indeed, the clothing, the ornaments she wears, and the stage around her are intentionally arranged to make her look like the Ecuadorian baroque depictions of saints found in Quito's colonial churches (Figures 20 & 21). In Nieto's words, these elements aim to reflect a moment in mestizaje that resulted from the European and the Ecuadorian crossings, but overall, it is a representation designed to potentiate the magnificence of the music LaTorre aspires to generate (Jaramillo, 2018).



Figure 20. Frame taken from the *Temporal* video shows Nieto standing in an imitation of the stands where saints figures are located in the Compañía colonial church.



Figure 21. Cover for LaTorre's single *Ser Eternos*

The latest LaTorre single, entitled *Época Dorada*, incorporates most of the described characteristics. The singing is derivative but is coupled with synthetic sounds producing a juxtaposition of a yearned past and elements that seem to be coming from the afterlife.

The song's title is also a nod to the golden age of Ecuadorian music, but the lyrics speak of the "golden age" of a romantic relationship. That way, *Época Dorada* connects the personal –a love history– with the collective – the history of Ecuadorian culture. An approach that is also employed in "*Ser Eternos*" [Be Eternal], a song that seems to tell a love story but could also be about a collective desire to embrace the past:

We dream of not dying
We dream of being eternal
Your mouth over my skin

Soñamos con no morir
Soñamos con ser eternos
Tu boca sobre mi piel

To kiss your soul made of fire
To be infinite starts
To be the hot sun and the
volcano
You said we were born only
for shining
I want to be filled with the
glory
of your immortal soul.

*Besar tu alma de fuego
Ser estrellas infinitas
Ser sol ardiente y volcán
Dijiste que nacimos solo
para brillar
Quiero llenarme de la gloria
que tiene tu alma inmortal
(LaTorre, 2018).*

In this sense, the “immortal soul” could act as a description of tradition, and by embracing tradition, it achieves immortality. As mentioned, the golden age of Ecuadorian music was when composers looked deeply at the European and indigenous music heritages. They followed a nationalistic desire to build an authentic mestizo Ecuadorian identity by bringing these cultures together. It was imperative to define what separated Ecuadorian culture from Europe during that time. That was, in other words, condescending with the State’s official narrative, and many of the songs from this period became widely popular (Wong, 2011: 20). New artists like LaTorre, creating music inspired by styles that thrived almost a century ago, prove the resilience of the mestizo tradition.

However, it is worth considering that the golden age, also known as Ecuadorian music nationalism, followed European progressive ideas. Many common topics of the lyrics from this era, like the appreciation of nature, landscapes, women, and love, resonated with romanticism. Likewise, the revalorisation of the indigenous, which at times became fetishising, reproduced eurocentric and positivistic perspectives (Mullo, 2009: 34). Nonetheless, approaching tradition from the present is a dialectical process in which there is an opportunity to correct past mistakes and expand them to serve different but similar agendas. Or, as Toop (2011: IX) asserts when introducing his concept of “distant music”, “[...] a reaching back into the lost places of the past, the slippages and mirages of memory, history reaching forward in the intangible form of sound to reconfigure the present and future”.

Accordingly, one of the elements prominent in the music of Kingman and LaTorre not tackled yet is nature. Many of their songs refer to elements of Ecuadorian geography like mountains and rivers or reflect native mythologies and conceptions of nature. This could represent a form of

neo-romanticism, but it could also mean an evolution towards a post anthropocentric view of the word.

Re-embracing nature: towards a post-anthropocentric consciousness

In 2012 Swing Original Monks launched “*Tucán*”, a song that explicitly rages against colonialism and speaks of environmental awareness. However, the way the song argues about it is very peculiar. While the lyrics make statement after statement against the conquest, a soundscape composed by sounds of the rainforest slowly fades in until it takes the place of the music. Right before this, Gabriel Bauman, the lead singer in this song, asks for silence, making a “shhhh” sound. When the band performs the song live, everybody on stage freezes, as the sounds from the rainforest take the whole space for a couple of seconds. Suddenly the music comes back, the sounds of nature stop, and the lyrics return to the attack with lines such as:

go fuck yourself, fucker!
don't tell me that you discover the land
that I've inhabited way before you
came and settled
and I don't live alone, animals are here
too
we don't have elephants but we do
have a huge chorus of singing birds
we have frogs and big cats
sweetwater dolphins and an endless
amount of sweet creatures, mountains,
forest, rich and beautiful land
where no man had stepped before
now I am on your intimidating sight
oh shit, what you took is irrelevant?
How come what you did before doesn't
count anymore?
fuck, you are pretending
nothing happened! Come on!
pay attention!
Am I boring you with my
lyrics, gringo wannabe?
by looting and plundering
you took everything from us

[*anda a cagar a otro lado cabrón!*
no me vengas con que descubriste la tierra
en la cual yo ya vivo desde antes que tú
llegues y te plantes
y yo no vivo solo, también están los
animales
aquí no hay elefantes pero si un coro enorme
de aves cantantes
tenemos sapos y gatos grandes
delfines de agua dulce y un sin fin de
criaturas dulces
monte, bosque, tierra hermosa, abundante
donde el hombre no había entrado antes
ahora sí me tienes en la mira desafiante
a puta ¿lo que te llevaste es irrelevante?
¿cómo? no cuenta lo que hiciste en aquel
entonces?
¡chukcha te haces el loco! ¡ya hombre! ponte
trucha! ¡ponte once!
¿qué, ya te agoté con mi letra don agringao?
Apunta de saqueo todo lo has explotado y te
lo has llevado]
(Swing Original Monks, 2012).

With this song, the Swing Original Monks pioneered something that now repeatedly shows up in the music of the new wave of Ecuadorian electronic acts. It was already a paradox that the cutting-edge technology acts were also further exploring tradition. But now, many acts are inspired by Andean and Amazonian geographies; or are speaking of morphing into animals and introducing nature sounds into the music. That speaks of an intention of decolonising the conception of nature and raising a posthuman image of the non-humans.

In this regard, a characteristic of posthumanism concerns “human exploitation of the nonhuman animal and nature” (Islam, 2016: 117). That is a matter that, to a significant extent, has been inspired by non-western conceptions of nature and the rejection of binary and hierarchical divisions between humans and non-humans prevalent in western thought (Luisetti, 2016: 215). Thus, incorporating nature in contemporary Ecuadorian independent music goes beyond dissolving the borders that separate the modern from the traditional. Reconnecting with nature, on many levels, rather represents the blurring of boundaries that separates non-humans from humans.

Some of the most conceptual uses of sampling in the Ecuadorian scene aim at reconciling nature with humanity and, in that matter, with technology. For instance, in “*Lluvia*” [rain], a single of Kingman’s first album *Respira* [breath], music melodies and beats build on top of samples of long soundscapes from the rainforest. Such aesthetic, of course, is not an accident; it intentionally presents nature as a subjective form and not a resource. In that matter, postcolonial and posthumanist perspectives have remarked how western anthropocentric and ecocentric idiosyncrasies have turned nature into an object valuable to humans only when it becomes a resource (Braidotti& Gilroy, 2016; Whatkins, 2018).

Nature has been devalued or objectified in modernist approaches to sound. For instance, in *The Art of Noises*, futurist Luigi Russolo (1913) expressed, “Ancient life was all silence: In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born.” Likewise, other modern experimental approaches such as Pierre Schaeffer’s “music concrete” or John Cage’s (1953) *Experimental Music* argued for the urgency of finding ways to “let sounds be themselves”. Yet, this inclusiveness towards non-musical sounds suggests that sounds are “raw materials” or

represent an escape from producing meaning, which is assumed to be a human-only skill (Watkins, 2018: 223).

However, many ancestral cultures contrast significantly in their perspective towards the sounds of nature and, in that respect, nature itself. Assuming the sounds of nature as meaningless has rather been a modern idea. Nature has always held profound connotations and subjectivities for many ancient American cultures. As Hendy (2013:45) explains:

It's in Latin America [...] that we're best able to see how deeply enmeshed past human cultures have been with the sounds of nature [...] In some of the ancient civilisations of Mexico or the Andes, whole symbolic belief systems evolved which put sound right at their centre.

Indeed, Kingman's invitation of a natural soundscape from the rainforest comes from the influences of ancient Amazonian cultures. The symbolic inclusion of nature aligned with non-anthropocentric messages he also expresses in the lyrics shows many references to sacred animals and elements of the rainforest such as snakes, panthers, birds, mountains, rivers, rain, and wind (Figures 22). For instance, in *Sendero del Monte* [mountain trail], the opening track of his debut album, the lyrics assert:

Now I become an animal
water mind, tagua heart
I become part of the retamal
I become a bit more normal
very necessary in the basic world
I am liquid, cell of noise

[*Yo me convierto ahora en un animal
mente de agua, corazón de tagua
yo me vuelvo parte de todo el retamal
me vuelvo un poco más normal
muy necesario para el mundo básico
soy líquido célula de ruido*].
(Kingman, 2017)



Figure 22. Frame taken from the video for the song *Sendero del Monte*, which shows Kingman putting on the mask of a parrot (a sacred animal for many of the rainforest cultures). Right after this frame, the video shows abstract images of an anthropomorphic bird dancing to the music.

Transforming into an animal or acquiring attributes from nature are typical narratives in Amazonian so-called Jivaro groups. Among these cultures, the relationships between humans and nature are balanced and transcend the binary division between nature and culture, prevalent in western civilisations. Furthermore, in everyday practices and narratives, there is no sense of superiority of humans over non-humans but a horizontal relationship in which they coexist as part of a greater whole. On this, anthropologist Philippe Descola (2013:16) asserts that for Amazonian cultures, “[...] the forest and the cultivated plots constitute theatres of a subtle sociability within which, day after day, humans engage in cajoling beings distinguishable from humans only by their different physical aspects and their lack of language”.

Poetic references to nature are also present in most of LaTorre’s songs. Nonetheless, unlike Kingman, this approach to nature is not inspired by ancient cultures. European romanticism indirectly influenced LaTorre as it inspired Ecuadorian music nationalism of the 1930s. Far from being a contradiction, this does not break the decolonial impetus prevalent in the scene. On the contrary, despite the obvious differences, Higgins (2017) asserts significant connections between romanticism and posthuman ecocriticism. Some of these connections being:

[...] the relationship between human and nonhuman agency; the precarity of human life on an increasingly volatile planet; and the interplay of individual consciousness, political structures, and earth systems (Higgins 2017: 3)

From Mamá Vudú and the man behind the electronic avant-garde project Niebla FM, Edgar Castellanos is entirely aware of these similarities. In the late 2010s, Niebla FM was one of the pioneer projects in using electronic devices to explore Ecuadorian music traditions further. However, in 2020, Niebla FM launched *Andinista 1 & 2* [climber of the Andes], a double album of electronic ambient compositions inspired by the Andean highlands (Bayas & Jaramillo, 2020). As the album's name indicates, this is a sound exploration of the Andes. Therefore, such a concept resonates with the journeys that composers from the romantic era used to make to natural places to find inspiration for their compositions. Accordingly, some of the tracks use words that give the impression of being taken from an explorers' field notes like Solar Azimuth, Glaciar Limit, Pajonal, and Tableau Physique. The latter is the name that the famous geographer and proponent of Romantic philosophy gave to his diagrams of Ecuadorian volcanoes, Chimborazo and Cotopaxi.

The artists analysed in this section generate a shift of consciousness that sees nature beyond resources and profit by presenting nature as a subjective being. This way, this music promotes a counter-narrative to the dominant way of seeing and using nature which has been increasingly harming, sometimes irreparably, the environment.

For instance, the Ecuadorian rainforest and the indigenous groups have historically inhabited these territories and struggled to keep oil and mining companies away. Modern capitalistic exploitation of these natural regions has put them and those who inhabit them in a vulnerable situation. All of these have been executed or happened with the consent of the hegemonic mestizo populations. Hence, contemporary fusions of traditional and electronic music, nature, and technology are perhaps an attempt to bring an alternative consciousness that might push a disruption of dominant western canons — a much-needed shift in the consciousness of Ecuadorians, Latino Americans, and the world.

Coda and the risk of recolonising tradition.

Mestizo artists from urban contexts reconnecting with tradition and ancestral indigenous culture are not necessarily heroic. As this chapter argues, a critical impulse to decolonise the cultural heritage is certainly a prevalent characteristic of this music scene. Reflecting and tackling the intricacies of that intention is what this thesis cares about the most. Nevertheless, an

exploitative appropriation of subaltern cultures from a privileged position is a constant risk. Appropriating (or re-appropriating) the subaltern may appear to be critical. Still, it could also be about a privileged group using exotic aspects of its culture to follow a hype.

Mestizo artists reconnecting with their indigenous roots is certainly a compelling symbolic message for local audiences. However, when this music reaches international audiences, one could question if such acts are about artists from privileged backgrounds appropriating indigenous elements to their personal benefit. As Vályi (2011, location 3753) mentions, “Musical borrowing practices are highly politicized: the most urgent question is whether the indigenous people have control over how they get represented through uses and abuses of their music.”

Indeed, there has been a tradition of exploiting indigenous by privileged mestizo artists in the visual arts from Latin America. Ecuadorian indigenismo was incorporated in the State’s populist propaganda. Furthermore, it has been questioned for its essentialism, naive romanticism, and objectification of the indigenous (Andrade, 2011). In this regard, all across the continent, music compositions created in mestizo contexts have historically incorporated indigenous traditions. However, these compositions have often used indigenusness as a symbol of inclusiveness that contrasts significantly with the actual exclusion of these populations (Pérez de Arce, 2018). Hence, history indicates that the music produced within the contemporary independent scene and its approaches to tradition are always at risk of representing a continuation of a colonial hegemonic logic rather than proposing a disruptive critique.

There is, in fact, a growing "otherness industry" that thrives on the fascination around exotic non-western traditions. From world music to ethnic food, otherness gets commodified, and the culture and struggles of non-westerns and minorities have not escaped this trap (Ponzanesi, 2014: 2). Like Jamenson (1991) argued in his critique of postmodernity, even subaltern voices become commodities in late capitalism. However, indigenous populations have resisted colonialism and the neocolonialist nature of modernisation.

That use of neglected cultures for their exotic value is a constant topic in conversations with colleagues and friends. Some assume that is cultural appropriation in a colonial sense, some do not think that is the case, and others, like myself, do not have a definitive answer. However, stealing and profiting from the music of unprivileged others is not often straightforwardly detectable (McLeod, K. & Kuenzli, R. 2011). Music enables complex connotations, and it would

be deceiving to make simple conclusions. However, as this thesis has been arguing, at its best, Ecuadorian independent music produces a resignification of what it means to be mestizo. Nevertheless, the former does not mean that some of these encounters with traditions will reproduce a colonial ethos.

In my experience interviewing and personal conversations with artists, I have found that most of them reflect on the risks of approaching tradition. For instance, Mala Fama, an indigenous electronic producer from Imbabura, rarely samples original recordings. However, when he does, he is cautious not to reproduce past colonial practices that produced and sold recordings from indigenous musicians without recognising their authorship (Skolnic, 2018). That is also the case of Quixosis. Furthermore, it is worth considering that as records of local traditional musicians are scarce, among emerging artists interested in exploring tradition, most of the time, the dominant strategies have been re-interpreting melodies and rhythms or collaborating directly with the artists, just like Marley Muerto did in most of the tracks of Paramar. There are also cases where the logic of cultural appropriation works the other way around. An example of this would be Los Nin, an indigenous group appropriating hip-hop to make politically charged music. This diversity of practices demonstrates that there should not be an easy judgement.

In this sense, this chapter argues that digital technologies have facilitated a reconnection with tradition and nature, fostering the emergence of acts that have introduced new meanings and values to the country's heritage. These emerging forms of music keep allowing local identities to keep moving and reformulate themselves. As Váyil (2011: 3688) mentions, incorporating any music "raises awareness, maintains these forms in the collective cultural memory, and creates new, contemporary forms of musical expression". Yet again, it is essential to keep questioning these cultural encounters beyond celebratory arguments by reflecting on how they penetrate markets and cultural industries worldwide. Many possibilities coexist in this music, just as they coexist in the mestizo idiosyncrasies.

That said, music is one of the channels on which subaltern heritages have survived. Thus, behind approaching tradition, ethical considerations demand being considered to confront this paradox. However, just because borrowing from the unprivileged is problematic, the worst scenario would be not to do it at all, especially when the unprivileged others are a neglected and obscure part of the lineage of the most privileged. As Jorge Drexler argues in *Movimiento* [movement], "if you want something to die, leave it still" [*si quieres que algo se muera, déjalo*

quieto] (Drexler, 2019). Speaking about movement, for the next chapter, I shift from the cultural implications of new technologies for making music to how technological changes have determined the distribution of independent music in Ecuador.

Chapter 7

The paradoxes of digital distribution: Ecuadorian Independent music in the digital age

In the four previous chapters, I studied Ecuadorian independent music focusing on its cultural meanings and social connotations. In this chapter, I approach this music culture from its dynamics of music consumption and distribution to expand the holistic perspective of this thesis. This approach requires focusing on how local independent music embeds into circuits involving the music industry, technologies, and media. Digital distribution, in that matter, emerged entering the new millennium generating a shifting and highly complex scenario for the way music is experienced around the world (Kusek & Leonhard, 2005; Smith & Telan, 2016). Thus, the aim is to study how the local independent scene has adopted and adapted to these digital transformations. The way music moves around the world is, to a great extent, determined by the structural conditions that the global music industry and technologies impose. Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate, such conditions are susceptible to and have been negotiated, resisted, or adapted from specific contexts.

For these reasons, it is imperative to consider that the ways music is distributed and accessed from the Global South context of Ecuador bring a different set of issues and connotations than in the hegemonic cultural centres' experiences. Considering that independent music in Ecuador has traditionally been produced in precarious conditions, the aim is to study how the digitalisation of music distribution has affected the ways local artists, audiences, and cultural mediators consume, distribute and experience music. Likewise, the arguments made throughout the chapter go beyond celebratory or pessimistic perspectives often tied to digital technologies. On the contrary, they describe a paradoxical scenario that speaks of opportunities and limitations to a range of actors, including audiences, artists, digital platforms, and the global music industry.

Accordingly, the first sections focus on the rise of digital piracy in Ecuador and its consequences in the first decade of the new millennium. As an illicit form of distribution, digital piracy has been criminalised and widely accused of harming the artists and the global music industry. However,

for Ecuadorian audiences, that has not necessarily been the case. Digital forms of piracy enabled access to music and culture locally not available otherwise, benefiting the audiences. Likewise, at some point, local pirate markets became an alternative channel of distribution for marginalised artists. Following the analysis of piracy, the next sections dive into how throughout the past decade, piracy increasingly got replaced by subscription-based streaming services such as Spotify, further expanding the reach and control of the global music industry over music distribution.

In other words and general terms, by targeting the peripheral and Global South condition of Ecuador, digital distribution through licit and illicit means has generated three crucial changes: opening access to a wider variety of music from Ecuador; it facilitated the creation of alternative channels of distribution for Ecuadorian independent music; and expanded the reach and control of global music industries over peripheral contexts like Ecuador. Moreover, there is a focus on the specific effects of the transition from illicit to licit digital distribution considering three different perspectives: audience, mediators, and independent artists. Such effects, as mentioned, are not described as entirely positive or negative. The argument refers to complex outcomes that imply that some conditions have improved, benefiting some actors but have imposed limitations on others. However, a significant finding is that this transition has tended to reinforce global hegemonies.

This paradoxical scenario required designing a methodological approach to tackle local experiences and structural conditions. Hence, I have strategically used qualitative and quantitative methods to study digital distribution from the contrasting perspectives of the audiences, artists, mediators, and the industry. However, for the most part, and in keeping with the rest of this research, most of the accounts presented come from ethnographic observations and auto-ethnographic experiences. Ethnography, in this case, provided an insightful perspective to approach and understand the local from my position as a consumer, platform user, and media producer. Indeed, as a consumer/user, I have experienced how illicit and licit digital distributions have operated locally. Likewise, my experience as a producer mediating the relationship between audiences and artists through generating digital media content came in handy as it allowed me to experience the possibilities of these platforms. Over time, this experience has allowed me to gather information from plenty of informal conversations and ethnographic interviews on the opportunities and issues that artists and managers experience with digital platforms. As a supplement and to achieve a panoramic perspective by gathering

information from a vast number of actors, I surveyed the satisfaction levels of local independent artists with the current streaming platforms conditions.

This mixed approach aims to reflect on both the specific experience of Ecuador and the global structures that impose systems of distribution. The qualitative ethnographic perspective reports on the local perspective; however, it is limited with no clear understanding of how the music industries and digital platforms control the distribution globally. Therefore, some information comes from reports on music distribution and access to technology. Reports produced by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) have been important sources of hard data reflecting how the industry has experimented with the transition to digital distribution. Furthermore, these documents also reflect the industry's ideology behind global music distribution. By this, the aim is to demonstrate that global industries' best interests do not align with the best interests of artists and audiences from the Global South context of Ecuador.

Streaming, the industry and Latin America today

The music industry and digital distribution have reached an apparent symbiosis.

Subscription-based streaming platforms, mainly Spotify, have pushed the industry to recover its arguably lost ground due to digital piracy (IFPI, 2015, 2019). In this context, Latin America has gained a significant presence in the global music stage as reggaeton artists such as Daddy Yankee, Maluma, J Balvin, and Bad Bunny started topping global charts. The rhythm of reggaeton has transcended Latin America and now shows up in international pop hits such as Justin Bieber's Sorry (2015) and Ed Sheeran's Shape of You (2017). However, in the first decade of the 2000s, the situation was moving in the opposite direction. The recording industry was not hesitant to blame piracy as one of the main reasons it reported significant losses in the Latin region for most of this decade (IFPI, 2017). So, does the recent success of reggaeton represent the beginning of the inclusion of Latin America on the global stage? Are Latin American artists thriving in these conditions? Are these enthusiastic claims by the industry accurate?

Answers for such questions are far more complex than the claims major labels and leading streaming platforms make. It would be highly naive to think that the presence of reggaeton on the global stage is paving the way for other forms of Latin Music to do the same. It might seem that Latin America is, in essence, reggaeton for the industry. The incorporation of this

Afro-Caribbean style into the mainstream may, for the most part, be rather reinforcing stereotypic representations of Latino culture(s) as hypersexual and exotic (Rivera, 2019). That way, the explosion of reggaeton is not a sign of a post-eurocentric, more inclusive industry. It is a sign of a music industry that has learned to profit through otherness while turning it into a sterile commodity (Ponzanesi, 2014).

Accordingly, Ecuadorian artists' conditions have not necessarily improved despite the industry accepting streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music for distributing music worldwide. Two of the issues Ecuadorian artists faced in a pre-digital age have arguably remained in the digital age. Those issues are the inability of find ways to be incorporated into international circuits and the generation of a fair system for distributing music.

Looking at the relationship of the global music industry and Latin America in perspective would reveal that the region has remained a consumer rather than a producer of contents in the transition to digital music distribution systems. There were times, however, when music was a localised experience. Due to the globalisation of music by media technologies, music has become a transnational experience where even in peripheral regions like Ecuador, international entities impose conditions for local producers. In other words, although national borders sometimes seem to melt, hegemonies and inequalities prevail. Thus, as announced in the introduction, it is imperative to confront the celebratory narratives of the industry, explore beyond the tip of the iceberg, and examine in-depth how these digital transformations have taken place in the context of Ecuador.

Before Streaming: Piracy and independent circuits in Ecuador

Generating a more accurate and critical understanding of the current state of music distribution requires rethinking piracy as a contingent and ambivalent phenomenon. The intention of this section is not to celebrate or demonise piracy. Thus, it is imperative to question the dominant narrative of piracy as a threat to the artists, the industry, and even society as a whole.

Accordingly, following Lobato (2014), piracy is a problematic, complex, and multifaceted phenomenon that can open opportunities for consumers and producers, especially in peripheral contexts.

Even before digital formats emerged, tape-based piracy was in part responsible for the decline of local record companies in the 1980s and 1990s (Wong 2012: 12). An emblematic local case was Fediscos, probably the most important and historical Ecuadorian record company responsible for producing the most prominent names of Ecuadorian traditional music in its golden era. Nonetheless, piracy was not the only factor responsible for Fediscos' descent; a deep political crisis and the inability to adapt to the CD format appropriately played a significant role (Gonzales, 2017). In addition to that, the decline could also be the consequence of the increasing penetration of international music that started in the 1970s and only increased in the following decades.

For the 2000s, a pirate market based on distributing physical copies allowed local audiences to access a far more diverse music catalogue than those available in legal distribution channels. It is worth remarking that the catalogue in local record stores was extremely limited due to factors like the poor distribution of independent anglophone music in the region and the lack of investment of the majors in the Global South. Thus, piracy became the primary and, in most cases, the only way to access certain kinds of music from the country. Piracy indeed thrived and established a vast market that ended up virtually making record stores obsolete. Indeed, for years, the recording industry reported huge losses in most Latin American regions (IFPI, 2017). However, digital piracy was not exactly a problem for local audiences.

Piracy in Ecuador: a consumer perspective

In the 1990s, those interested in rock and other alternative forms of music faced an adverse situation. The catalogue of record stores was highly narrow, and despite few shows in small radio stations, there were no straightforward ways of accessing these forms of music. But curiosity surpassed the limitations, and strategies that take advantage of emerging technologies kept successfully overcoming restrictive access to culture. For instance, home taping brought relief to the limited offer of rock in the country. Middle-class fans who could travel to the U.S. or Europe brought back music magazines and original recordings. Borrowing the magazines and making copies on tape from the originals was a common way of distributing the music among peers. Home taping almost immediately evolved into an informal market. Those with more specialised tastes could go to small shops that sold self-made tape copies of original

recordings. For those with more popular taste, however, there were street sellers. These sellers were easy to spot in the most congested streets of the country.

Another critical opening moment to global alternative music forms came with cable television. The Latin American branch of MTV emerged in cable television in 1993. The network played a crucial role in integrating the region into a global music flow while amplifying selected alternative Latin American music acts. MTV opened a connection with regional and Anglophone alternative music. Of course, this was only possible for the middle and upper classes who could afford cable television, which was initially available only in urban centres. Between 1996 and 1997, MTV mysteriously became available on open access TV in Quito.

By the end of the 1990s, while the internet became more widely adopted, MTV shifted from playing music videos to reality shows. By the early 2000s, peer-to-peer services such as Napster, Emule, Limewire, and Torrents became the alternative for those who wanted music not available in local record stores. Just as it happened with cable, at first, only a few privileged fans had access to an internet connection. Nonetheless, there was the option of distributing copies and playlists burned onto CDs. Another important effect worth mentioning is that access to the web contributed to expanding the knowledge around non-mainstream and more obscure forms of music. Web search engines, chat rooms, and blogs facilitated finding obscure international forms of music and their stories.

Just as home taping did, the internet also provoked an informal system of pirate copies on CDs and later on DVDs. As digital-based piracy quickly became a thriving market, big record stores closed. That was the case of Tower Records, which landed in 1999 and closed its doors in 2004. Of course, the company blamed its failure on illegal digital downloads and piracy (El Universo, 2014). Pirate distribution got impressively sophisticated in a few years, going way beyond just selling copies. Some pirate sellers became a sort of a mix between content curators and dealers. Some stores made and distributed compilations around music styles or put complete discographies of artists on mp3 format CDs. They would also accept on-demand requirements of specific albums and artists that they would get for the clients in a couple of days. From the consumer's perspective, this was, of course, convenient on many levels. Perhaps clients did not have an internet connection, or it was too slow, or maybe you did have the knowledge of how to find the files by themselves. But for 5 dollars, customers could get a CD with the entire discography that you could later burn or put on an MP3 player (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Marilyn Manson's discography burned on an MP3 CD and distributed by LinuxCenter

Because of the small file size of audio, these forms of pirate distribution were first exclusive to music, but they eventually caught up with movies. Music piracy quickly became secondary to movie piracy. The demand for films got so big that some pirate sellers went from the street to stores in shopping malls. The former shows how loose the regulations over piracy had been and demonstrates how naturalised and accepted by the people piracy became.

The industry vs the people

In many ways, piracy became a way around the country's peripheral, economic and infrastructural limitations and the region. Indeed, digital or analogue piracy allowed overcoming the geographical restrictions imposed by film and music industries (Lobato, 2014). In that sense, piracy in the new millennium offered affordable, accessible, and much broader options than the legal distributors usually did in peripheral geographies such as Ecuador. Of course, there could be several reasons why a copyright owner, independent or not, decides not to distribute a product in a particular territory. Nonetheless, whatever the reason, Global North industries defined what could be available or not in certain regions. Hence, it is intriguing that the industry has attacked a system that distributes products that it would not even offer in specific geographies.

A key for understanding this incongruence is that most IFPI's affiliated institutions belong to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). Despite IFPI's attempts to present itself as a multinational institution, it represents the interests of recording industries from the United States, the biggest market in the world (G. Aguilar, 2010: 147). This fact may be enough to be suspicious of the industry's narratives and actions against piracy. Perhaps, more than economic losses, it might be that their real problem with piracy was that it destabilised the industry's role as a gatekeeper that decides what gets to be distributed in specific locations.

The IFPI has not simply portrayed piracy as theft; it made far-fetched and misleading assertions to justify actions against it. For instance, in 2003, it launched a report entitled *La Piratería Musical, el crimen organizado y el Terrorismo* [*Music Piracy, Organized Crime and Terrorism*]. The main argument against piracy was that it was helping finance organised criminal activities and terrorist organisations from the Middle East (Figure 24). These kinds of assertions lowered in tone and became more subtle over time. But even with its most down-to-earth arguments, IFPI has been inconsistent. Based on the idea that legal owners are not directly benefiting from the consumption of pirate copies, the institution reported hundreds of millions in losses (IFPI, 2017). However, these alleged losses assume that consumers would buy the originals if the illegal copies were unavailable (Aguilar, 2011:150). An inconsistency considering that original records, as mentioned, were in many cases not even available in most of the region.



Figure 24. Capture of the FPI's 2003 report on piracy cover. The images suggest the content of the report. That is, that piracy is related to gun trafficking and terrorism.

Far from financing Middle East terrorist organisations, piracy became an opportunity to create small businesses and become the primary source of income for low-income families. When legal actions were announced to control piracy in Ecuador, some local distributors started to defend their activities. In fact, some pirate sellers printed in the DVD's boxes the slogan "*Trabajamos por la democratización de la cultura*" [We work for the democratization of culture] (Alvear, 2009). A consistent argument considering that around only 30% of Ecuadorians have the possibility of attending the movie theatres (Ibid.). For the rest of the country, those in rural zones and small towns, piracy might have been the only way of accessing any form of film production.

Piracy in Ecuador: the independent producer perspective.

The proliferation of pirate distribution, even considering that it might have contributed to making more culture available in peripheral regions, is problematic for the artists who rely on selling records as a form of income. Yet, it is worth considering that the presence of Ecuadorian artists on an international level has traditionally been limited. Before piracy thrived, not many local artists made significant profits from domestic record sales. In fact, for local independent artists, getting to make professional-quality recordings, even by the end of the 1990s, was an odyssey or a luxury almost impossible to achieve or finance (Hidalgo, 2020). Specialised studios, technicians, and the technologies required to record and manufacture music were extremely scarce. In that sense, for most artists, piracy did not represent significant losses.

In 2004, Cruks en Karnak, one of the most successful Ecuadorian rock bands of the 1990s, pioneered a strategy to “confront” piracy. For the local context, Cruks was not an ordinary rock band. As most rock produced locally during the 1990s was too aggressive for local media, the band created radio and TV-friendly rock. For that reason, their position towards piracy and the way they were affected by it was not the position of most rock bands. When they launched their 13 *gracias* (2004) album –recorded and mastered in a prestigious studio in Argentina– Cruks faced an odd situation in finding the best distribution strategy. Record stores were in massive decline, and piracy was on the rise. So the alternative approach they developed was to adapt to the conditions and use pirate distribution for selling their original copies at a reasonable price – closer to the cost of pirate copies (Murreita, 2004). The strategy did not work, and the album, which the band hoped was going to allow them to crossover to regional markets, ended up being their last studio album. However, it is not clear how lousy piracy was for the band’s interests; it could have been that the public reception did not go as expected. Whatever the case, the idea of distributing original recordings through pirates was certainly interesting.

For emerging independent bands, pirate distribution was not necessarily convenient. Some pirate stores specialising in distributing international alternative music became a spot to get recordings of local independent bands. Some bands even provided the pirates with DIY and cheap original copies of their albums (Viteri, 2011). With minimal options to get in radio stations and very few record stores, pirate distribution became one of the few channels to get independent music into the people’s hands. However, it was an option that did not offer direct profit, and neither did it promise significant exposure for independent acts.

That did not stop some small emerging scenes from tracing alliances with some pirate distributors. Around 2005, a hot spot to get access to rock and alternative music was a printing house run by a group of young Russian folks called LinuxCenter. Although the place's main business was providing printing services, LinuxCenter used to sell compilations on CD containing complete discographies of international rock and alternative music on mp3 format. The store offered a book containing their catalogue of bands that expanded month after month. This place eventually became an ally of the local hardcore and metal music scenes. LinuxCenter was often where event producers went to print promotional posters for the gigs. The store's logo often appeared among the sponsors of these events. This sort of informal symbiosis between local emerging artists and pirates later expanded to movies.

In 2012, ASECOPAC (the association of Ecuadorian audiovisual producers) reported that piracy had expanded to over 60,000 formal and informal stores across the country, meaning piracy was the primary livelihood of many families (García, 2015). Nonetheless, after the international pressure of the World Trade Organization and a series of failed institutional attempts to control and punish piracy, the Ecuadorian authorities could not do more than tolerate it while trying to find a way to protect, at least, the copyright of local productions. Thus, the measures taken by the government consisted in legalising the distribution of original Ecuadorian films on DVD format through pirate distributors. This strategy was reported as beneficial, at least for some local producers (BBC, 2012).

The exhibition circuit of the margins: the experience of tecnocumbia

For most film and music producers, piracy was a problem they had to adapt to, which could offer modest benefits considering the precarious conditions of the country. Nevertheless, there are cases in Ecuador that thrived by intentionally using the available pirate markets to distribute their recordings. That was the case of tecnocumbia, a popular style in the country's lower classes and more peripheral sectors (Santillán & Ramírez, 2004). Tecnocumbia emerged in Perú in the 1990s, and its sound originally was a mix of Colombian cumbia played with cheap keyboards and synthetic-based rhythms. The Ecuadorian version of tecnocumbia added to the original sound influences of traditional styles such as sanjuanito and pasillo (Wong, 2011: 166). Despite the style's popularity, middle and upper-class white-mestizo populations view it as

kitschy and vulgar and consider it an inferior type of music (Wong, 2011:182). Hence, at least in its early years, tecnocumbia had no option other than to develop alternative strategies, and one of those was making deals with pirate distributors.

DIY and lo-fi strategies allowed tecnocumbia to quickly become an industry able to produce low-cost music videos and recordings massively. The videos found their way into minor television networks, and original recordings got distributed in small pirate stores in the lower-class neighbourhoods (Ibid.). Tecnocumbia's distribution of original records in pirate stores happened before Cruks en Karnak did so. The difference was that tecnocumbia succeeded through it. Nonetheless, distributing low-cost original copies in pirate stores did not last long. Eventually, pirate distributors mainly sold pirate copies of this kind of music. But tecnocumbia artists did not fight against this. Instead, they assumed it as an opportunity to reach more audiences, leading to more chances to get contracts to perform at live events (El Telégrafo, 2011).

By the mid-2000s, piracy made it impossible for local artists of all kinds to make profits from selling original records. Yet, tecnocumbia's strategy of assuming piracy as a distribution channel to reach wider audiences reveals an exciting point: piracy could be a distribution method able to bypass the gatekeepers of culture. Indeed, piracy does not care for the status quo, nor does it do social work; piracy simply responds to demand. In this sense, the relationship between tecnocumbia and local pirate markets proved that copyright infringement is not necessarily inconvenient for the artists and certainly not problematic for audiences.

Local independent music and piracy

Tecnocumbia and Ecuadorian independent music are profoundly different cultural expressions. These differences are determinant when it comes to the local impact they have had and the distribution systems they have used. The collage of different international and local popular music styles mixed in tecnocumbia is very effective. Many of its songs cover traditional and incorporate popular local and regional rhythms appealing to nostalgia and familiarity. This aesthetic has allowed it to reach local audiences in rural and urban zones, across different regions and multiple age groups. Though its lower class and kitschy aesthetics forced alternative distribution strategies, tecnocumbia's immediate popularity eventually opened doors

in AM and FM radio stations and television networks. So piracy ended up being only one of its many channels of distribution. Finally, the standard production costs for recording, making music videos, and even putting up live shows are highly resourceful, making them cheap and easy to produce in mass.

In contrast, local independent music has tended to move towards innovation, the cutting edge, and political confrontation. This set of attitudes has represented fewer opportunities to enter TV networks and radio stations for the local context. As the next chapter asserts, most media have had a conservative profile. Independent music artists are also concentrated in the main urban centres and appeal to the younger audiences, significantly reducing the market in a country like Ecuador. For that reason, distributing originals for promotion generated only discrete results for local alternative acts. With limited distribution channels, piracy alone did not represent much support and arguably neither much harm. Originals or pirate copies of independent music records became uncommon in pirate stores.

Moreover, it is worth considering that the investment in production that independent artists put into making albums is much higher than in tecnocumbia. Since local independent music follows Global North styles, the technical demands required to make, for instance, a rock album is considerably costly for the context. Even for live events, this has been a disadvantage when compared to tecnocumbia artists who, in many cases, only need a playback track and a mic to perform. On the other hand, rock bands need a far more complex backline to perform, even in small venues. In other words, the fact that tecnocumbia works under its technical standards is a tremendous advantage over independent music, which, on a technical level, compares itself to international standards.

Finally, the differences between tecnocumbia and local independent music are mainly class matters. Tecnocumbia is a more localised music scene; its elements allude to the national or, at the most, the regional. The former was key to its appeal for the lower classes. On the other hand, independent music requires audiences to access global culture, often in English, which has supposed access to costly media such as cable television, the internet, and education. Elements that, in a country like Ecuador with enormous class gaps, are only reachable for specific and reduced population sectors.

The end of piracy as we knew it, and towards the reemergence of the old status-quo

In the last few years, pirate stores that only a couple of years ago used to be crowded now look empty, and most have closed doors. Pirate street sellers are not as usual either, at least not in urban zones. Most of the stores remain in working-class neighbourhoods, and, in that matter, the remaining consumers of pirated copies are mainly older adults and low-income people. These are, of course, demographics that are expected to be the late adopters of new technologies (Tobbin & Adjei, 2012). The decline of this piracy based on distributing physical copies is, as the next section shows, to a large extent due to the popularisation of streaming services such as YouTube, Spotify, and Netflix. Digital and internet-based streaming has replaced the need for a physical format to reproduce images and sounds and has only kept the need for digital reproduction devices like smartphones, tablets, and computers.

From the consumers' perspective, streaming (either open access or subscription-based) has arguably enabled a more convenient experience on many levels. Users do not have to go to a store to get a copy or spend time searching on the web for a site that allows them to download an album or a movie. Likewise, the size of the catalogue of contents available is huge and expanding at an unprecedented rate. Therefore, streaming platforms have made culture available at a relatively lower cost for audiences.

For artists, the alleged advantage is that the thriving streaming platforms distribute licensed music. Later IFPI reports are very emphatic in asserting that streaming has evolved to be an effective tool, not only for combating piracy but for making the music industry expand. Indeed, Spotify contributes an estimate of 20\$ per user to the music industry (Mühlbach & Arora, 2020). However, artists expect to earn between \$ 0.006 to \$ 0.0084 per stream, depending on the streaming platform. Many high profile artists have emphatically expressed that the profit margin is unfair and might represent selling fewer digital downloads or physical copies (Ingham, 2019; Mejía, 2019). In general terms, it is safe to argue that the streaming age has made things favourable for the industry but not necessarily for Global North artists. But what is happening in the Global South of local independent artists in Ecuador?

Streaming and Independent music in Ecuador

To gain direct input from local independent artists and their use of streaming platforms, I surveyed a sample of 50 of the most prominent Ecuadorian artists. Most of the questions I made dealt with the use of streaming services, current distribution strategies, main sources of income, and satisfaction levels with specific streaming platforms. This section analyses their responses, looking for insights to understand specific issues in the use of streaming by this independent scene.

The sample for the survey was intentionally selected and included a wide range of styles and genres on the independent spectrum. It also considered long-standing projects as well as new ones to find out if the genre and the age of a project altered their perspectives over streaming platforms⁴⁸. The first significant finding was that all of the independent artists surveyed are currently using multiple streaming services, either open access services such as YouTube and Soundcloud, subscription-based platforms such as Spotify, Deezer, YouTube Music, or Apple Music; and platforms that allow selling digital or physical, such as Bandcamp and Apple's iTunes. However, results show that local artists are at least using YouTube and Spotify. Accordingly, the survey tackled the levels of satisfaction and perceived convenience in the use of those two platforms. But before delving into that, it is necessary to explain why streaming is becoming popular in Ecuador and how it displaced the local pirate market.

For streaming services to enter and popularise in a context like Ecuador, two things were required: access to digital technologies and internet connectivity. For a Global South country, these are not conditions to be expected. Indeed, there has traditionally been an access gap in the use of technologies between wealthy regions and less affluent places like Latin America and Africa, often referred to as digital divides (Regnedda & Muschert, 2018). Accordingly, in 2010 Ecuador's internet access accounted for one of the lowest Latin regions with 29.3 %. A significant difference if compared to the UK and the US cases, which accounted for 85% and 71.6%, respectively, in the same year (Our World Data, 2020). However, during this last decade, that gap closed, and in 2017, internet access in Ecuador almost doubled, reaching 57.27%, a number that surpasses the region's average (Ibid.). This fast growth was due to the increasing

⁴⁸ Another variable considered was location, and while the survey was delivered to independent artists from a diverse range of cities, the majority of respondents came from Quito, the capital, and two of the biggest cities, Guayaquil and Cuenca. Of course, these results only confirmed that independent music in Ecuador is vastly concentrated in urban centres.

use of smartphones and mobile internet services provided by phone companies. It is easy to speculate that as access to traditional internet connection was so scarce, the availability of mobile internet services rapidly compensated for the lack of connection. The percentage of ownership of these devices in the country grew from 6.2% in 2012 to 41.4% in 2018. In other words, it means that a significant number of Ecuadorians' first internet connections happened through a smartphone, and, for many, that is perhaps still their only connection. Therefore, this relative reduction of the digital divide due to necessity paved the way for streaming services to become widely adopted.

I confirmed this back in 2018 when the local independent label Poli Music contacted me (as a Radio COCOA member) to arrange a workshop for artists about digital distribution strategies dictated by Spotify representatives (Figure 25). One of the ideas repeatedly remarked in the event was how Ecuador had become a viable market due to its fast-growing internet connection and smartphone use. It felt very exceptional that an international corporation was trying to reach Ecuadorian artists. Yet, the intentions were selling their Spotify for artists service and the potential benefits. I elaborate on what have been the consequences of the penetration of subscription-based or freemium streaming services like Spotify further on. For local independent music, the first streaming service that made a significant impact during the last decade was YouTube. This video streaming platform brought different conditions and opportunities to distribute and promote music.



Figure 25. Poster for a Spotify’s event that Radio COCOA and Universidad San Francisco de Quito, the institution I represent, helped arrange. Part of the collaboration consisted in making a direct invitation to independent artists to the workshop that, as the title indicates, was on new strategies to distribute music.

Uses of streaming in the local independent music scene

YouTube, which started as a streaming service that relied on user-generated content, enhanced the possibilities of disseminating alternative media (Burgues & Green, 2018). Indeed, independent Ecuadorian artists embraced the platform. Due to its counter-cultural reputation and the local society’s conservatism, explained in earlier chapters, Ecuadorian independent music lacked exposure on mass media outlets such as radio and television stations. In that sense, the chance of uploading music videos and tracks to the platform and the ability to share them through social media certainly contributed to bringing audiences and independent artists closer together.

Moreover, as the next chapter explores further, YouTube potentiated new forms of mediating independent music. In the first decade of the millennium, before YouTube became popular, music blogs created by fans became the digital alternative for creating content about alternative music scenes. However, YouTube allowed content creators to go beyond making text-based

content and producing other media forms such as video. That has, indeed, been the case of independent web-based media projects such as Radio COCOA, Epicentro, and Sesiones Al Parque, which have constantly produced live music sessions for independent artists. Hence, as a streaming service, YouTube created an environment that facilitated the dissemination of local independent music in a context with very few opportunities to do so. In that sense, the service partly compensated for the lack of access to offline media outlets such as radio and television, which traditionally have played a role in promoting music. Furthermore, along with social media, YouTube contributed to fostering a community around independent music. However, YouTube and social media's visibility has offered has a limited outreach that usually reaches niche audiences rather than massive ones.

In the past six years, Spotify joined YouTube bringing a more specialised music service, and it rapidly became one of the mandatory channels for distributing music. Nonetheless, in theory, it serves purposes beyond promotion. Spotify also works as a direct form of distribution and, to a considerable extent, replaces record sales or paid digital downloads. In that sense, revenues from streams are supposed to compensate for selling records or digital tracks. Accordingly, Spotify and YouTube are the most used services, but they are the ones the artists surveyed confirmed have brought either revenues, exposure, or both.

Indeed, the artists asserted that both platforms had increased their audiences in virtually equal measures. However, they have not become a consistent source of income. In the survey, 64% of the respondents argued that only Spotify generates revenue, but not significantly. 75% of the artists indicated that the primary source of income comes from performing live shows. Moreover, only 8% picked streaming revenues as their primary source of income, alongside merch and sponsorships. An important thing to notice is that those who indicated paying for a third-party digital distribution service known as aggregators were slightly more satisfied with streaming services. Paying for an aggregator, in theory, offers benefits such as having tracks included in a playlist with a significant number of followers which not only potentiates revenue but exposure to international audiences. However, artists currently paying for aggregators rated an average of 3 on a scale from 1 to 5, the benefits of using these services.

That stated, the question remains, are Ecuadorian independent artists satisfied with the conditions that streaming imposes? One of the survey questions directly tackled that by asking, "Based on your experience, do you consider that streaming has benefited the independent Ecuadorian scene?". The responses were divided but not very optimistic. 42.1% of the

respondents affirmed that streaming has been beneficial; 15 % think that streaming has not brought any benefit, and the remaining 42.9% provided ambiguous responses. When asked to justify their answers, most asserted that while streaming has helped increase audiences, it is not fair or effective as a revenue system. Some of the commentaries were “partially it has advantages and disadvantages”, “they help to gain exposure, but the percentage of profit is incredibly unequal”, “they create exposure, but the revenues are insignificant”. On the other hand, the positivity towards streaming comes from the lack of alternatives the Ecuadorian artists have had for distributing their music. After all, streaming services have become one of the few available distribution channels.

A not-so-evident problem with the available streaming systems comes when audiences migrate from YouTube to Spotify to access music. With the latter, the possibility of having mediators able to direct attention to music out of the range of the mainstream, for the most part, reduces. In my experience of over ten years of producing videos and other sorts of content for independent artists using YouTube, I have noticed a reduction in the number of views of these kinds of productions used to average. This decline coincides with the popularisation of Spotify. With that in mind, in the survey, I asked if the artists have noticed a decrease in the impact of their music videos on YouTube. As expected, newer projects argued that it has increased or maintained; however, projects with more than five years of existence asserted that they had noticed a decline.

These results could indicate that audiences that once made a habit of listening to local independent music using YouTube have now switched to Spotify. In this regard, unlike YouTube, Spotify is a platform less social and more restrictive in the sense that it mainly facilitates a relationship between artists' tracks and the platform users. In other words, it is the platform that imposes the conditions in which its users interact with the music available in the service. It does so mainly by generating personalised recommendations and playlists based on the user's history on the platform. However, these meditation-based algorithms tend to follow specific biases that would not be as strict if more peer-to-peer mediation was available. In that sense, the consequent questions are, what does Spotify want its users to listen to? What are the platform biases in their recommendation system? And, in that sense, does Spotify care for things such as supporting local acts over the international mainstream?

Tensions between the global and the Local in Spotify.

In the pursuit of finding out how Spotify is mediating Ecuadorian music, the logical thing to do is to navigate the platform and find out. After entering the word “Ecuador” in the search option, the top result displayed is a playlist entitled “Ecuador top 50”. The description indicates it is an automatic chart that shows the most listened to tracks in the country. Surprisingly, at that moment, none of the 50 tracks that make the playlist belonged to Ecuadorian artists. The vast majority were reggaeton songs except for The Weekend’s Blinding Lights. High-profile Latin artists such as Maluma, J Balvin, Bad Bunny, Karol G have more than one track on the list. The rest of the search displays options were other chart-based Spotify playlists like *Éxitos Ecuador*, *Viral 50 Ecuador*, *Top Canciones de la década* [Top songs of the decade]. Below these Spotify’s charts, the platform locates the playlists curated by users. However, the number of followers of the most noticeable un-official playlist accounts for a fraction of most of Spotify’s official ones. In most chart-based playlists, the results of high-profile reggaeton artists also dominate.

Nonetheless, one Spotify playlist not based on charts stands out: Made in Ecuador. As I am writing these lines, the playlist cover shows Paola Navarrete –an indie-pop soloist– and most of the 60 artists in it are alternative Ecuadorian acts. The dominant style is indie, but there are electronic, rock, and pop artists. Of course, this is a human-generated playlist, and it has a pretty specific purpose. It is what Spotify considers to be the artists that best represent the country. The description of the playlist displays in English and Spanish the message “Representing with pride”. In that sense, Spotify curation is much more open to independent and alternative artists than most local radios have traditionally been. However, Made in Ecuador is a very one-dimensional playlist for it privileges indie and excludes others such as metal, hip-hop, Ecuadorian national music, and tecnocumbia. However, what catches the attention is that despite being an official Spotify playlist, it only has 12,498 followers (Figure 26).



Figure 26. Capture of the Made in Ecuador playlist

Thus, straightforward conclusions could be drawn. Ecuadorians are not listening to Ecuadorian music on Spotify in large numbers. Judging by what the platform indicates are the most listened to tracks in the country and the limited reach of Ecuadorian artists on the platform, it becomes clear that Spotify cannot balance the mainstream and international with the independent and alternative. If anything, the evidence indicates that Spotify may be mostly favouring the regional mainstream, which, as mentioned, is now reggaeton. In that sense, Spotify does not seem to be fostering a diverse music experience either.

It is worth remarking that Ecuadorians favour foreign forms of music over local styles, which is not a consequence of streaming. Still, it is an idiosyncratic issue addressed in the previous chapters. In other words, this lack of audiences for local music is not an issue that streaming platforms started. However, it certainly seems that Spotify does little to shift that logic and, to a certain extent, it might be reinforcing it. As for right now, streaming services like Spotify might be fueling a classic sense of globalisation. That is, a homogenising process that expands even further hegemonic cultures while endangering the culture of the peripheries.

From “music like water” to the new era of colonialism

The 2017 Internet Society Global Internet Report presents an evaluation of the state of the digital divide. The report mentions that while gaps are closing, Latin America and Africa still

account for regions that are mainly consumers rather than producers of information and technologies in the current internet economy. Moreover, the report asserts:

The ability of new players to emerge could be limited if the trend toward the consolidation of networks under the control of a few large, global players continues. Large Internet platforms are deepening their market positions, dominating Internet infrastructure, services, and applications (Global Internet Report, 2017: 84)

In other words, today's internet economy is increasingly becoming a space where Global North corporations are imposing conditions worldwide. Accordingly, the penetration of subscription-based streaming in geographies peripheral to the global music industry is not generating significant opportunities to close the gap between the so-called developed and developing countries. In Ecuador, for instance, while these services provide unprecedented access to global content, they are not favouring, at least not significantly, local producers, not even at a domestic level. Hence, above all, the current environment fosters a one-directional flow of information in which the centres keep being the centres, and the peripheries keep being peripheries.

The experience of Rocío Fuente, current manager of the local independent label Poli Music, confirms this. Fuente worked for years from Spain and Miami with prominent music management offices that represented high-profile Latin artists. However, in 2015, personal reasons forced her to move to Ecuador, where she started her independent label. Thus, Fuente has experience doing management from two opposite poles: the global industry and the independent local. Moreover, the last five years in her career have also implied transitioning from doing management following the conventional off-line strategies to a management that has adapted to the fast-changing digital conditions.

Reflecting on what it has been like working from Ecuador, Fuente (2020) mentions that it means working in “disconnection”. Ecuador is a context, she explains, isolated from the global circuits – something comparable with inhabiting a distant Island. Indeed, there are no actual offices of streaming platforms like Spotify or Deezer⁴⁹, big publishers, nor are there offices of global labels apart from one representative of Universal music. In her opinion, the “bridges” that could allow further – domestic and international – exposure to local music are non-existent. Furthermore, it

⁴⁹ There is only Claro music which is a streaming platform from a local cell phone operator.

makes managing much more demanding as no professional outlets specialise in providing local music exposure. In that context, however, the availability of streaming platforms in Ecuador has not come to represent, at least not remarkably, connection.

Ironically, the industry that once stumbled because of the emergence of digital distribution has found an effective mechanism to control the global circulation of music on streaming platforms. Indeed, digital distribution is becoming very similar to the old pre-digital model as European and US corporations remain the dominant players. As Eriksson et.al (2019) expose in Spotify Teardown:

Spotify's very existence remains dependent on the willingness of the so-called Big Three—the global record companies Universal, Sony, and Warner—to renew music licensing deals. In essence, these must not demand more royalties than Spotify is able to pay. The Big Three form an oligopoly that can act as a cartel when dealing with any music streaming service (Eriksson et.al 2019: 33)

For Edgar Castellanos (2020), founder of Mamá Vudú, one of the most important local independent bands and a prominent festival producer, the transition to digital once represented an opportunity to create music that transcends the limitations of the marketplace. Indeed, he believes that digital technologies have been beneficial because they have cheapened and facilitated the cost of producing music. Likewise, digital platforms have enabled dynamics where the audiences have more power than they did when the old media system dominated. However, he asserts that corporate powers are learning to turn the table for their benefit as this has happened. This way, Castellanos synthesises the crumbling of the liberatory expectations that the internet once awakened.

Entering the 21st Century, the increasing popularisation of the internet announced a less restrictive and more democratic flow of information (Castells, 2013). Likewise, to a certain extent, the web initially shifted the rules of the previous media logic by turning passive audiences into participative audiences by allowing user-generated content to coexist with corporate content (Jenkins, 2006). Accordingly, in “The Future of Music”, Kusek and Gerd (2005: 3) predicted that in the near future, music was going to be more “ubiquitous, mobile, shareable, and as pervasive and diverse as the human cultures that create it.” Accordingly,

these authors quoted a 2002 New York Times article in which David Bowie asserted, “I’m fully confident that copyright, for instance, will no longer exist in ten years, and authorship and intellectual property is in for such a bashing. Music itself is going to become like running water or electricity.”

For the second decade of the 21st, that enthusiasm has dissipated. Platforms like YouTube that emerged focusing on allowing audience participation have increasingly regulated and filtered participation while favouring corporate interests. Prominent music streaming systems licensed music distribution by the majors is stronger than ever. This reinstitution has happened while these platforms have limited audience participation and community-based interaction options while isolating user-centred experiences around music. Indeed, since 2015, Spotify, besides acting as a music provider, has become a “data broker” (Eriksson et al. 2019: 3). That means the platform was able to turn the music preferences of its users into data that profiles them. This metadata is later sold to marketers like those from the major labels. Hence, marketers can micro-target the users within the same platform by generating playlist that actualises daily or weekly (Ibid.). For instance, every subscribed user gets a “Made for You” playlist, a personalised auto-generated playlist designed to fit the user’s unique taste.

However, while sticking to the user’s personal preferences, the algorithms that create these personalised categories tend to favour music from major labels or already consolidated artists (Ibid.). In other words, the system works by connecting personal tastes with already popular trends, creating loops of information and echo chambers (Meenakshi, 2019). In that sense, the algorithmic administration of musical taste reinforces what O’ Neil (2016) asserts most of today’s algorithms systems are doing: reinforcing the status quo. Nonetheless, the way the process works generates the illusion of agency and control over content for the user.

Under these circumstances, peripheral scenes like the Ecuadorian will most certainly remain small niches as they will not get better and more horizontal possibilities to gain exposure. Limiting social interaction within the platforms also generates a centralised system that manages the music preferences of its users. As Wall (2017: 36) concludes in his analysis of Last.fm and Pandora, the tendency is that automated systems of recommendations replace human roles like DJs have played by curating music and fostering new trends from the radio. Likewise, the fact that digital platforms limit human interaction in sharing music also neglects the grassroots and communitarian aspects of the music experience. And as users migrate and

increasingly concentrate their listening practices on one platform, these streaming corporations gain overwhelming control of how music is distributed on a transnational level. Thus, the imbalance between corporations and users and centres and peripheries gets reinforced.

The idea of a future of music as a common good, “music like water”, has instead become one of music privatised and even further orchestrated by corporations. As Fuch (2016) asserts, the more digital media is incorporated into our everyday lives, the more digital media gets controlled by profit-seeking corporations. Taking this analysis to a Global South perspective, the evidence I provided throughout this chapter shows that digital technologies like music streaming platforms push digital colonialism. In Kwet’s (2018:1) words, this is colonialism that, instead of conquering land, is about big tech corporations using digital technologies to increasingly gain “direct power over political, economic, and cultural domains of life”. On this matter, Couldry and Mejias (2019) assert that the increasing corporatisation has started a “new era of coloniality” that expands beyond geographic control. The fact that digital devices and platforms can track ordinary activities such as listening to a song, watching a movie, or simply moving around with a phone reflects a sort of colonisation of private aspects of everyday life.

Conclusions and possible responses to streaming globalisation

In this chapter, I covered the transition to digital music distribution systems from the perspective of independent Ecuadorian music. Two moments have defined this transition. The first is a vast pirate market of physical copies, and the second is the institution of streaming platforms. An undeniable effect in both moments has been much less restrictive access to international forms of music. In other words, illegal or not, digital distribution certainly democratised access to music from Ecuador, which in a pre-internet era was extremely limited.

The experience of local producers with this system is different. For the most part, piracy has considerably reduced the chances for local artists to profit from selling their music in physical or digital formats. With the popularisation of streaming platforms such as Spotify over the past decade, piracy has lost ground. Although local artists can now get revenues from streams, these are often scarce and insignificant. So is the exposure they get from making their music available on these platforms. In fact, in Ecuador, Spotify recommendation systems do not favour local independent artists that already lack domestic and international exposure. On the contrary,

the platform favours international music tied to the global music industry. And, in the least amount, what the platform decides through human curation processes is what you should be listening to. Therefore, as local audiences centred their listening habits in using this kind of platform, the chances are that they would keep getting exposed to international forms of music much more than they are to local artists.

As digital systems establish themselves as the leading form of music distribution worldwide, getting fair revenue from recordings becomes harder. Consequently, artists have been forced to find alternative ways to profit, which often involves doing extra work to get exposure in and out digital platforms. This work certainly benefits the platforms but only exceptionally the artists (Mühlbach & Arora, 2020). For the vast majority of independent Ecuadorian acts, profit comes mainly from performing live⁵⁰. However, getting the fanbase required for selling tickets forces artists and managers to get involved in (self) promotional and merchandising practices that are poorly or not compensated. Ironically, by uploading their tracks on these transnational platforms, artists contribute with content that allows these platforms to charge users for a service (Burns, 2016). Therefore, on many levels, the current conditions of digital distribution have contributed to a further precarisation of creative work in an already precarious context.

Dissatisfaction with these conditions is on the rise worldwide, and there is an urgent need to find better and fairer alternatives to culture distribution (Mejía, 2019). As the precarisation of creative labour and the growing gaps between centres and peripheries remain, States' policy responses become vital.

The Spanish government recently introduced an exemplary measure, which will require streaming platforms such as Netflix and HBO to devote 5% of their local revenues to finance Spanish and European audiovisual production (Muñoz, 2020). A comparable measure could be instaurated in Ecuador. Since September of 2020, streaming services such as Spotify and Netflix have started paying taxes. So following the example of the Spanish State, a logical measure would be creating a policy that requires a portion of those taxes to finance and support local music and audiovisual production.

⁵⁰ In this regard, artists and managers face other sets of adverse conditions, such as the lack of proper venues and a number of bureaucratic limitations that make the process of putting on a show very difficult.

As exposure and promotion remain the primary necessities of local independent music, the next chapter focuses on the alternative media practices that once supported and are currently supporting the local independent scene. The digital age has, in that regard, opened opportunities to do alternative media in a context where traditional media outlets have repeatedly neglected local music.

Chapter 8

Alternative Media and the Ecuadorian Independent scene

Media is an essential aspect of understanding popular music. As Wall (2013:154) asserts, “popular music is music produced for, and through, the modern mass media”. After studying the meanings and significance of Ecuadorian independent music and the issues around its distribution in the current digital systems, this chapter explores the role that local media have had in communicating the scene. Considering that Ecuadorian independent music has been widely excluded by global entertainment industries and the local mass media, alternative media initiatives have played a significant role in mediating this music to the local audiences. As argued in earlier chapters, Ecuadorian independent music has a history of opposing the status quo the local media has traditionally represented. Consequently, alternative media channels undertook the mission to spread and create positive value around the scene.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the tensions between local mass media and local independent music in two different moments. First, in the early decades of the rock movement and before the arrival of digital media. And second, on the alternative media practices that have to counter the marginalisation of Ecuadorian independent music by local and global media hegemonies, emphasising the use of digital media in the process. That implies that the chapter tackles grassroots media practices like publications, radio broadcasting, and journalism that disseminated local independent music in a pre-internet age. From there, it approaches the digital media initiatives that followed the impetus of non-digital alternative media but were potentiated by the participatory possibilities the web came to offer.

Over the last decade, many digital alternative media projects like Plan Arteria, Radio COCOA, La Última Escena, Indie Criollo, La Descarga Plataforma Cultural, and others have followed the mission of spreading local independent music. One of the most prominent cases has been Radio COCOA, a university-based digital media project focused on creating cutting-edge media content for documenting and further disseminating local independent music.⁵¹ As mentioned in

⁵¹ I am not arguing that the emergence of digital media necessarily replaced non-digital forms of media. Online and offline media practices have often coexisted or transitioned from one to the other. Nonetheless, for this research, the

the introduction of this thesis, I have been involved as a media producer since the project's early days. As Radio COCOA became an essential ally of today's scene, being part of it has positioned me in a privileged position to do this research. The experience has, in that sense, allowed me to explore the scene from an insider perspective, specifically concerning its media aspects. My participation in the project encompasses over ten years of exploring the many dimensions of producing alternative media from Ecuador. Some of these dimensions include doing media as promoting alternative cultures, building cultural heritage, and fostering critique through arts and music.

Alternative media and independent music

Alternative media is media that contrasts with mainstream/hegemonic corporate forms of media (Atton, 2015). Moreover, in the context of independent music, alternative media could be more specifically described as “[...] non-corporate media that are driven by content, as opposed to profit, and based upon a “Do It Yourself (DIY) ethic.” (Furness, 2017: 189). Pirate radio, zines and fanzines, music blogs, and the work of independent record labels are some examples of a tradition of alternative media generated by DIY music cultures throughout the world. These media practices respond to the lack of interest from conventional media on non-commercial, emerging, and edgy forms of culture. In this sense, main media corporations have almost strictly focused on the commercially viable. Their massive reach has allowed them to cement themselves as gatekeepers of culture, restricting access to the disruptive and unconventional, especially when they do not find ways to turn it into profit. Hence, alternative media has strategically been a way around profit-driven gatekeepers of culture. As Atton (2015:1) asserts, alternative media plays an inclusive role because it “presents forms of information and knowledge that are under-represented, marginalised or ignored by other, more dominant media”.

Context is key to understanding the meanings and implications around specific cases of alternative media. Contextual conditions such as media access, media literacy, freedom of expression, economic inequality, and any form of inequality are definitive for alternative media's role. As Furness (2017:192) mentions,

division between offline and online serves illustrative purposes as it describes what defined two different moments in local alternative media.

[...] white people have an incredible degree of privilege compared to people of color, so it is wrong to suggest that white suburban teenagers who put out political punk records in the twenty-first century are the same as African American abolitionists who printed their own newspapers in the nineteenth century.

Ecuador's marginalisation from the global music industry provoked restricted access to international forms of culture and, at the same time, hyper-localised the country's music. In addition, precarious socioeconomic conditions and the imperative conservatism have been important adverse factors when studying local alternative media practices. Indeed, precarity and repression defined the first years of Ecuadorian independent music and its relationship with the local mainstream media.

For over two decades, alternative practices expanded due to participatory possibilities brought by the less restrictive and relatively easy to access channels the web created. Blogs, social media, and streaming services became tools used by alternative media dedicated to communicating and spreading independent music worldwide, and Ecuador has not been the exception. Therefore, as mentioned in the introduction, the chapter explores two different kinds of Ecuadorian alternative media: offline and online. Each implies restrictions and possibilities and reflects two distinct moments of Ecuadorian independent music and its alternative media.

Offline alternative media and independent music in Ecuador

Independent music scenes have traditionally relied on alternative media strategies to bypass corporate mainstream media control and create a direct flux of information between artists and audiences. At least, this has been the narrative that explains the inherent correlation between alternative media and independent music scenes. Although this view might seem appropriate, it might also establish a binary distinction between the mainstream and the independent that, like any binary, risks oversimplification. Nonetheless, it is worth considering that this idea originates from UK and US punk scenes that have spread beyond their original geographical matrices. Hence this heroic DIY narrative has become an archetype for independent scenes worldwide (Furness, 2007: 191), and Ecuador has not been the exception.

In this regard, massive media outlets in Ecuador have sustained a conservative agenda and, in that sense, have acted as an extension of the local status quo. As explained in chapter 3, the early decades of rock music in the country confronted a society that saw this emerging music culture as a threat to its conservative values.

A key figure in this regard was Pancho Jaime, who, besides promoting rock music vehemently attacked the political class from his DIY tabloids, was often persecuted. As expected, local mass media was more complacent than critical about these attacks. For instance, when Pancho was captured and tortured by the police in 1984, his beaten face with an issue of one of his publications on his mouth appeared in local television news, perhaps as an intimidatory measure (see chapter 1). Five years later, when he was killed on the streets, the local mainstream media barely covered the event and has made very little to question the impunity around it.

Likewise, in the 1990s, police repression against rock fans increased and was even openly encouraged by presidents. The mass media, again, did not denounce these abuses. Major TV networks and papers kept portraying rock as deviant and inappropriate, indirectly fueling and justifying the repression. "Rock Ecuatoriano", a low-budget documentary produced by Pablo Rodriguez in 1998, collects several television news stories and specials on rock music. Most of these focus on analysing rock through ideas around Satanists, immorality, and mental illness around rock music. A 2001 editorial published in *Vistazo*, one of the most important local news magazines, synthesises the tone of misinformation and prejudices local mainstream media created around rock music for years. The article's title was "...in the name of the devil. Rock concerts and the Satanic groups that threaten our youth." [... *en el nombre del diablo. Los conciertos de rock y los grupos satánicos que amenazan a nuestros jóvenes*]. The article featured opinions from psychologists and catholic priests questioning rock music (Figure 27).

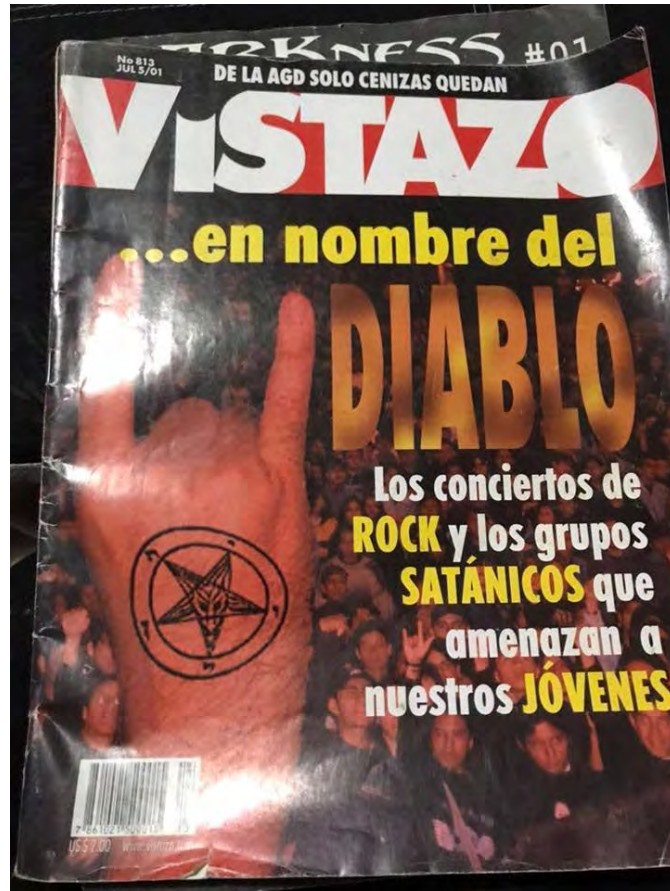


Figure 27. Vitazo magazine cover

This evident prejudiced environment created hostile conditions for rock music and, as a consequence, it limited its promotion. Nonetheless, committed fans followed Pancho Jaime's example, started radio shows, or started producing self-published zines on the scene. Others became professional journalists and managed to cover independent music, sometimes even from conventional media outlets. These alternative media practices have played an important role in supporting independent music by fostering small communities and fueling its independent spirit.

Radio and other forms of alternative offline media: a legacy

There were some exceptions that managed the lack of presence of rock on radio in Ecuador. The few shows and DJs dedicated to the genre played a vital role, especially before the internet. One of the most influential radio DJs has been Carlos Montoya Sánchez, who since the 1980s managed to create and host radio shows dedicated to rock and metal on FM stations. For over two decades, his show, *Romper Falsos Mitos* [To break false myths], aired in some of the country's biggest radio stations: Radio Pichincha, Radio Visión, and Hot 106 (González, 2017). Another prominent example is Mayra Benalcazar, who, in the mid-1990s and still in her teenage years, created and hosted *Prohibido Prohibir* [Forbidden to Forbid], a show focused on playing local independent bands. Like Montoya's, Benalcazar's show aired on FM radio stations such as La Metro Estación and Radio Pública for several years.

Beyond having created some of the few media outlets for rock and other forms of local independent music, Montoya and Benalcazar linked their role as independent music broadcasters with political activism. According to Benalcazar (Bayas & Viteri, 2020), in the 1990s, Ecuadorian rock started to break ties with classic rock and metal and adventure into new edgy sounds and experimental fusions. These emerging sounds, created by bands such as Sal y Mileto and La Grupa kept close ties with early rock figures such as Jaime Guevara, Hugo Hidrovo, and Perros Callejeros. All of which were artists linked to social protests and political activism. Indeed, Benalcazar mentions, during this period, the independent scene was part of a broader artistic scene that included dancers, poets, and filmmakers with a progressive, human-right focus and environmental agenda.

Considering the abundant conservatism and the fact that radio station owners were often former Ecuadorian military personnel, Benalcazar assures that playing rock music was not an easy task in the 1990s. To illustrate this, Benalcazar (2020) tells the story of how, after playing Rage Against the Machine's Killing in the Name – perhaps for the first time in Ecuadorian FM radio – followed by Sui Generis' *Botas Locas* [crazy boots]⁵²– she got fired from her first radio DJ job. After this experience, *Prohibido Prohibir* landed on the rock music station *La Metro Estación* from where it reached a national audience for over a decade. However, Benalcazar's approach as a broadcaster contrasted with the rest of her colleagues in the station, who played mainly

⁵² A song against the Argentinian military institution and the dictatorship.

foreign rock music. In fact, *Prohibido Prohibir* became one of the first shows that opened the door to prominent 1990s independent bands like Mamá Vudú, Muscaria, Misil, and Pulpo 3.

La Zona del Metal [Metal Zone] established itself as one of the most important outlets for independent music in the same timeframe. The show, founded by Benalcarzar's close friend Hugo Beltran, was launched in 1996 and focused on underground metal acts. Beltran's commitment to the underground scene motivated him to go beyond radio. The show also became a zine and made a series of compilation albums with local underground metal bands. Like the shows previously mentioned, *La Zona del Metal* aired on different radio stations over the years. However, the show's most significant spot was probably Radio La Luna, a station with an upfront anti-establishment agenda that played a significant role in convening the protests that in 2005 ended up overthrowing former president Lucio Gutiérrez. Indeed proof of Ecuadorian rock's anti-establishment agenda.

El Vagón Alternativo [the Alternative Wagon] is the last emblematic show worth mentioning. Edwin Poveda, the show's producer, was raised in the United States and is a passionate fan and collector of artsy, alternative, and obscure styles from the US and the UK like brit-pop, new wave, post-punk, indie, and shoegaze. His enthusiasm and love for this kind of music eventually motivated him to get a radio show of his own in 1998 (Echeverría, 2018). *El Vagón* aired for over two decades on *La Metro Estación*. More than a show that attracted massive audiences, *El Vagón Alternativo* instead became a sort of cult show for alternative music geeks. Particularly in its early years, Poveda was not interested in playing local emerging bands, nor did he care about aggressive music and political activism styles. However, he became a sort of music curator that assumed the mission of presenting music styles that were unknown and relatively inaccessible from the Ecuadorian context. Indeed, in an article published by Radio COCOA in 2018 on Poveda, many local independent artists and media producers expressed how relevant *El Vagón Alternativo* has been as it consistently exposed local audiences to international alternative music (Ibíd.).

Romper Falsos Mitos, *Prohibido Prohibir*, *La Zona del Metal*, and *El Vagón Alternativo* are some of the most emblematic shows that helped to consolidate the independent music scene of the 1990s and early 2000s. The work of their producers persisted despite all the difficulties and hostilities that rock and independent forms of music faced in Ecuador. Their shows and careers

on the radio are some of the most lasting examples of alternative media produced in the country, but they were not the only ones.

Dedicated fans have often hosted short-lived shows in minor AM and FM radio and even small televisions networks pushing smaller scenes all over the country. However, with the increasing popularisation of the internet in the last decade, most of these shows, which aired for over two decades, started to get off the air. Some of these shows have managed to transition to streaming radio. However, this has not become a successful migration. Their audiences are not growing, and their decline is proof that digital media outlets, as this chapter will show, have replaced offline radio. In other words, their decline is perhaps proof of how, as asserted in the previous chapter, global platforms are colonising fans' listening habits while reducing the opportunity of local mediation of music.

Nonetheless, the impact of digital technologies has not always represented a threat to alternative media outlets dedicated to independent music. The internet opened opportunities to launch and produce new forms of alternative media to a larger extent. But before dealing with the grassroots internet-based alternative media, it is imperative to briefly tackle media efforts other than radio that have contributed to pushing the local scene in the pre-internet age.

Along with radio, alternative media dedicated to independent music has also encompassed paper-based publications. Often, fans who, after becoming professional journalists, managed to produce written self-published materials or contents for newspapers on independent music. A prominent example of this is Orlando Mena, an experienced journalist and rock fan who in 2003 decided to produce the zine *Atahualpa Rock* after being unemployed. This DIY publication promoted the history of national Rock and promoted its identity (El Universo, 2004). A similar case is Pablo Rodriguez, who has been independently producing zines, radio shows, documentaries, articles for newspapers, and even books on the local rock scene. This series of efforts gained him the nickname "*periodista del rock*" [rock journalist]. The importance of the body of work produced by journalists like him and Orlando has certainly contributed to documenting the rock scene and has told its story.

From radio to printed publications, alternative offline media on independent music cemented three essential functions later followed by alternative online media. The first and foremost has been disseminating local and international alternative forms of music in a restrictive context.

Second, transmitting the ideologies that go along with the music, which, in this case, has represented encouraging aggressive attitudes towards the political class and the status quo. Finally, the third has been generating documentation and building memory. As rock and alternative forms of music in Ecuador have, for the most part, been marginal and countercultural expressions of the youth, its history, and transmission of its legacy have mainly been carried by the amateur and professional efforts of dedicated fans.

Online alternative media and Ecuadorian independent Music

In the first decade of the 21st century, access to the internet in Ecuador was lower than in most parts of the world. However, as the previous chapter tackled, the internet allowed the proliferation of a pirate market that significantly opened access to international forms of music. Beyond distribution, the internet also democratized opportunities to produce music-related content. Fans created blogs to write about bands, and by the end of the decade, social media and streaming platforms like YouTube became distribution channels that allowed artists to connect with fans directly. Nonetheless, the impact and reach of this internet-based communications were at first modest, considering the lack of access to the internet from Ecuador in the early 2000s.

As social media and streaming platforms became popular in the 2010s, online alternative media initiatives emerged. The digital world began to offer the fans accessible and dynamic ways to produce content about local artists. Doing radio, making live sessions and music videos, and writing about music became possible without a dial station, a television channel, or a budget to print. So for a context like Ecuador, this accessibility became an opportunity for creating specialised content focused on the local music culture that could skip the restrictiveness of the local mass media. Moreover, these emerging forms of alternative media started to play a crucial role.

An emblematic case in that regard is Radio COCOA, a media project that emerged in the Universidad San Francisco de Quito in 2010. The then dean of the School of Communications and Contemporary Arts (COCO A), Hugo Burgos, gathered a journalism and media students and faculty group to start an online radio station (Figure 28). Hence, Radio COCOA started

broadcasting shows focused on a wide range of independent music styles. In that sense, the project followed the tradition of college radio stations in the United States, which became an alternative outlet for forms of music produced on peripheral locations often ignored by the mainstream (McLeod, 2005: 285; Kruse 2010: 625; Wall, 2017).

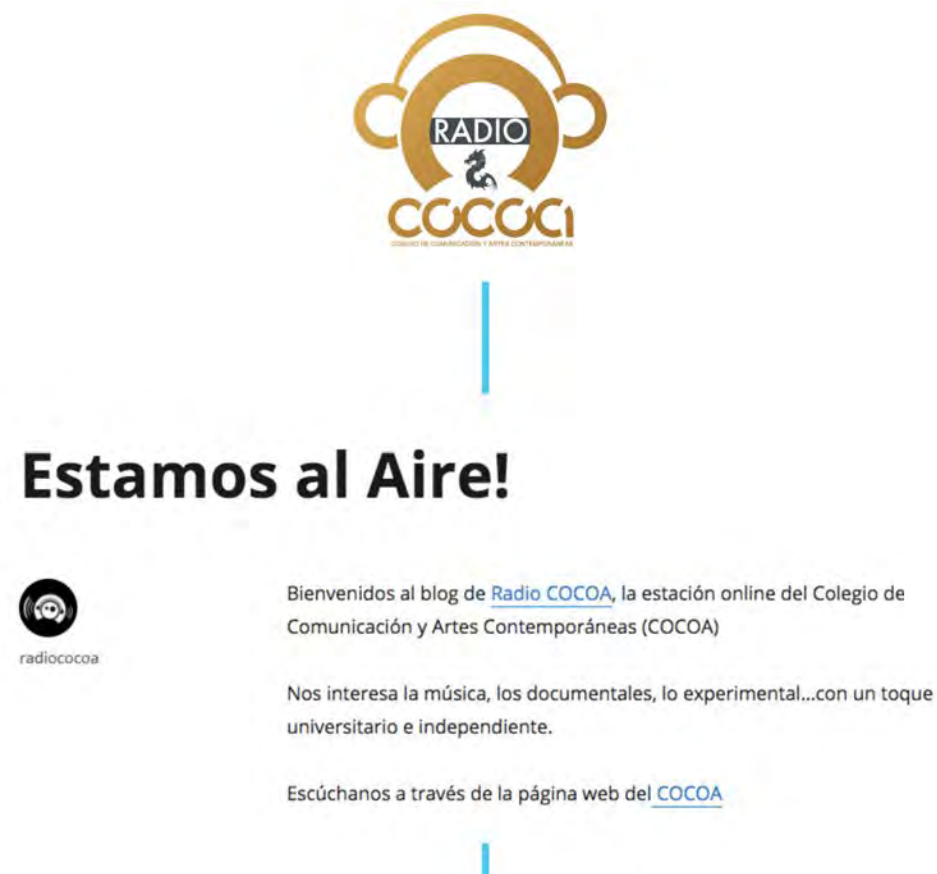


Figure 28. First post on the Radio COCOA blog. March 16, 2010. It shows a message in Spanish that says, “On Air. Welcome to the blog of Radio COCOA, the online station of the School of Communications and Arts (COCOACI). We are interested in music, documentaries, experimental stuff... with a college tone and independence. Listen to us through the COCOACI website.”

The first few months of Radio COCOA focused on putting up an online radio station with different thematic shows defined by specific music genres. In that sense, during its first few months, Radio COCOA was an internet radio station. Very soon, the project explored other possibilities the web offered. One of the early adventures was broadcasting live video shows

through Justin TV. It started with small shows, but in 2011, RC broadcasted Quitofest, the biggest independent music festival in the city. These experiences showed that the online nature of the project could expand beyond radio.

By 2011, Radio COCOA started producing video and editorial content. These productions could easily be distributed through streaming and social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Thus, the project went from being an online radio station to a transmedia platform producing radio, video, and editorial content dedicated to local independent music. It kept, however, the word “radio” on its name for its roots on college radio.

This evolution towards the transmedia also redefined the purpose of the project. Radio COCOA played 50% international and 50% local independent music in its radio facet. However, when it started producing editorial and video content, the project shifted its focus towards local acts. These productions involved further journalistic and creative efforts, which led to closer involvement with the local scene. As the web kept establishing changing conditions, Radio COCOA has kept adapting and exploring new possibilities for creatively producing media for pushing independent music.

As mentioned, Radio COCOA has not been the only independent media platform, but it has undoubtedly been one of the most lasting and prolific local online media outlets. Being a university-financed project has generated a solid base for keeping independence and creative freedom not restricted by market conditions. Furthermore, in exploring alternative media in Ecuador, being creatively involved for over a decade, Radio COCOA has given me an insightful perspective in the interest of understanding the creative process and its possibilities. Thus, the following sections study the most significant facets of the project.

Radio COCOA as grassroots independent media.

For eight years, the website of Radio COCOA has displayed the message, “We believe in the independent spirit, and we keep that premise as our main motivation for making contents that challenge the status quo and the conventional” [*Creemos que el espíritu independiente es sinónimo de libertad, y mantenemos esta premisa como nuestra principal motivación para traerles programación que desafía al status quo y a lo convencional*] – a premise that follows ideals of independence and DIY music cultures but from an Ecuadorian perspective and through the use of digital media. The nature of Ecuadorian independent music, which lies in the

intersection of counter-hegemonic political views and the resignification of local forms of culture, obviously could not have been followed by a conventional approach to media.

Indeed, creative freedom is a feature of independent music whose independence implies not following mainstream trends, repetitive formulas, and passivity. As Forde (2015:3) argues, the essence of alternative media is to challenge media power. Accordingly, if local media has privileged the international and conventional, the alternative must be focused on the grassroots and unconventional. Therefore, Radio COCOA's main target has been the local.

Nonetheless, projects like Radio COCOA generate media that do not necessarily choose to follow a DIY ethic. This independence is part of the context for many reasons. Perhaps the most significant reason is that alternative forms of music, specifically local ones, do not have a commercial appeal in a context like Ecuador. Mayra Benalcazar assures that this has been one of the biggest challenges for producing media focused on the local scene (Bayas & Viteri, 2020). Accordingly, the DIY and independent spirit that nurtures alternative media projects like Radio COCOA has implied being recursive and using the available means to create and disseminate content about the scene. Under these conditions, it is safe to assert that an alternative media platform such as Radio COCOA could have emerged in Ecuador without the web and its participatory possibilities.

Alternative media and digital participatory media.

The web has become a space where the audience can participate and create content. Streaming and social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook, while being global corporations, have allowed and encouraged audience participation. Of course, this participation is not entirely free of restrictions, and it is still a form of interaction that paradoxically feeds international corporations. Nevertheless, these interactive dynamics have been definitive for Radio COCOA.

Digital media has certainly become a relatively less restrictive and accessible space for producing and distributing culture. Moreover, the web's popularisation made the old system of passive media spectatorship coexist with the possibility of active media participation. Additionally, web-based media also blurred the boundaries that once separated amateurs from

professional content producers (Jenkins, 2006; Lessing, 2008, Prior 2010:12). To a certain extent, this enabled independent producers in Ecuador to generate and disseminate alternative content to the global cooperative media and the massive local media. As Verboord and van Noord (2016: 60) argue, the internet has increasingly enabled new amateur voices to emerge and become “influential players”.

Indeed, a definitive difference between traditional and alternative media is that the latter has often included other content producers like amateurs and community members (Atton, 2015). Consequently, as a university-based project, Radio COCOA has been generated mainly by students and novice professionals who are also fans of independent music. The project also includes faculty members like myself, but most are journalism, advertisement, design, or film students. The amateur component of Radio COCOA has, in fact, been definitive for the project’s identity in many ways. Students and novice professionals are encouraged to produce content under certain premises but with creative freedom and seeking innovation. The results have often been products they would not be able to create and publish in conventional media outlets.

Considering that Radio COCOA emerged as a local version of US college radios of the 1990s, it could be seen as a transmedia version of independent punk publications. College students often produced DIY publications like the punk fanzine *Hanging Around* at the University of Edinburgh. These amateur publications were often an initial stage in renowned music journalists such as Paul Morley and Jon Savage, who started as fanzine editors and writers. Furthermore, as representatives of subcultural spaces, amateur media production often aims at challenging media orthodoxy while using “the available technological resources of the present” (Atton, 2015: 443).

The transmedia nature of the web has been definitive for the project as it allows the generation of content and narratives across different media platforms (Jenkins, 2016). As mentioned, almost immediately, Radio COCOA produced content for multiple platforms. That pushed its members from a specific formation in film, journalism, design, or advertising to evolve into more eclectic professionals. It is common to have film students or novice filmmakers writing articles and journalist students producing music videos or live music sessions.

In that sense, Radio COCOA has also functioned as a creative media hub focused on exploring new and cutting-edge ways of doing media in the current shifting media environments. The

student's and novice professionals' lack of experience has not necessarily been assumed as a weakness but as a strength to the team. This approach differs from what young professionals in Ecuador would be able to do for media corporations which, as asserted, are very conventional and profit-driven. Furthermore, team members are motivated to exhibit their work to a significant audience while pushing something they are already passionate about, independent music.

Local online alternative media and the content self-generated by independent artists have relied on the audience and artists sharing the content on social media profiles. In other words, if it was not for the communal aspect of social media, Radio COCOA could have only achieved minimal impact. The active participation of the audience rating, commenting, and sharing content through social media opened the possibility for alternative content to reach wider audiences. Indeed, Radio COCOA's Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram accounts have become effective tools to spread live sessions, videos, documentaries, editorials, and podcasts. Yet, these systems increasingly present more limitations and restrictions to foster grassroots organic interaction.

As the previous chapter remarked, increasingly popular streaming platforms like Spotify, while providing unprecedented access to music from Ecuador, are turning music listening into an individualistic practice. As listening habits tend to centre on platforms that limit user interactions and music sharing options, the grassroots media function of becoming a mediator between artists and audiences fades away. The internet in which Radio COCOA emerged was different and thrived in exploring the participatory dynamics social media and pre Spotify streaming services came to offer. Thus, given the current circumstances, Radio COCOA's most important mission, to foster a community around the local independent music scene, has remained limited.

This section reflected on the participative possibilities and limitations of digital media as practised by Radio COCOA. Nonetheless, it is imperative to assert that the human factor determines the identity of an alternative media project beyond technology. In other words, as technology has been definitive for what Radio COCOA has represented as an alternative media project, its identity is not entirely determined by technology but by how the project has mediated culture.

Disseminating and creating meaning in independent music

Beyond disseminating music not appealing to the local mainstream and building a sense of community through social media, mediation, in the case of Radio COCOA, has also been a process of signification. Music journalism and, specifically, the tradition of rock journalism have played a significant role in exposing the music to audiences and generating value and meanings. For instance, Atton (2009:53-55) reflects on how from the 1960s, rock journalism was responsible for attributing the genre an aura of authenticity and originality that sometimes went as far as elevating the genre to the status of legit art. Likewise, the author addresses a tradition of music journalism born in the UK with the subcultural attitude of the 1970s “punk vanguard”, in which a process of “meaning-making” through writing fostered the subcultural DIY ideology of the punk movement⁵³. The experiences of rock journalism, in that sense, show the importance of media as a mediation capable of conducting and amplifying meanings embedded in the music.

Accordingly, Radio COCOA’s transmedia approach has had a different focus and effects in distinct moments. In the first few years of the project, its most quantitative impact came when it launched a video content line through YouTube. In the early 2010s, no local media outlets showed independent bands playing live, so the first live session we produced and launched on YouTube caught unprecedented attention. As video productions started gaining popularity, written content became more specialised and insightful. As the editorial and video content started thriving, online radio, the original dynamic of Radio COCOA, started fading away. That was because streaming platforms increasingly and effectively started replacing music radio. Eventually, however, podcasting emerged as an alternative not for playing music but for creating meanings and telling stories behind the music and artists. In perspective, these constant changes taught us that the web was a media landscape that demanded the continual reformulation of strategies. And in that process of continuous adaptation, Radio COCOA effectively disseminated the music to make more critical and more profound content across different platforms. Hence, the following section describes how the transmedia approach of the project evolved from being a channel for disseminating independent music to a project interested in creating meanings and heritage around independent music.

⁵³ Yet, Atton also addresses how in the 1990s, a rather “conformist” and vain journalistic approach was established as a result of more commercially driven conditions.

Streaming video as independent music promotion

In the early 1980s, music videos proved to be an effective way to promote music. However, they represented huge investments only record labels could afford most of the time. Eventually, the technologies to produce video became more accessible, and web platforms to share all sorts of content emerged and thrived. YouTube, for instance, allowed users to upload and share videos produced by themselves. This participative feature was soon adopted as an outlet to continue with the independent music tradition of spreading content through accessible means.⁵⁴

In September of 2011, Radio COCOA launched its YouTube channel and soon realised that video was a more effective tool than online radio to promote music from the web. It is worth considering that before YouTube, local bands lacked opportunities to have their music videos playing on television. So YouTube basically offered an opportunity for periodically presenting music in video format. At first, the kind of content Radio COCOA produced mixed two visual forms: documentary and music video. An essential reference for the project in that regard was the 1990s MTV Latin America. Yet, it also got inspired by straightforward live music sessions and videos presented by channels like “La Blogothèque” and NPR’s Tiny Desk Concerts. In that sense, the spirit of Radio COCOA’s content sought to create edgy aesthetics and designed formats that work for the web.

Radio COCOA’s YouTube channel has hundreds of videos in its ten years of existence, including live music sessions, interviews, vlogs, weekly news, artist profiles, music videos, and documentaries. This production has pushed emerging bands and has kept fans informed about local events such as gigs and festivals in the country’s main cities. Some of our live sessions and music videos, for instance, have been very important for breaking music acts. Some examples have been Da Pawn, Lolabúm, La Máquina Camaleón and Paola Navarrete.⁵⁵ Moreover, although music has been the project’s primary concern, it also covered independent art and film scenes.

However, YouTube has not operated the same way, and the ways it relates to its users have changed over time. In its early years, it promoted the platform as “youthful”, “rebellious”, and,

⁵⁴ However, it is worth mentioning that previous to this, college and pirate radio, home tapping, fanzines, and even peer-to-peer services were thought of as alternative channels used to share and spread content bypassing the industry’s gatekeepers (McLeod, 2007: 285).

⁵⁵ Over the years, other local channels have emerged with their ideas and aesthetics –especially around live sessions– joining us in this mission of promoting bands through video. In that regard, *Sesiones al Parque*, *Epícentro* or *Sesiones Sofar* are worth mentioning.

overall, an innovative alternative to television (van Djick, 2013: 110). YouTube's essence was, as mentioned, participatory culture as it relied almost exclusively on user-generated content. In fact, until 2010, its slogan was "Broadcast Yourself". Nonetheless, the platform increasingly transitioned to a more feasible business model, which implied making deals with television companies and record labels (Burgues & Green, 2018). In this transition, the platform kept encouraging amateurs to upload content to the platform, yet, it also implemented algorithmic systems that favour specific productions over others. This algorithmic administration of content revealed that the platform does not play a neutral role in exposing content to audiences. Like the one we produce, most grassroots media content started coexisting with big media global industries in hierarchical conditions (Ibid.).

Indeed, in Radio COCOA's experience, Youtube and social media platforms have increasingly limited our agency in how our contents are distributed and consumed. It was evident how the odds of organically viral contents happened more often in the first five years of the channel. As mentioned, as subscription-based streaming services like Spotify popularised, Radio COCOA's organic growth possibilities significantly decreased as the option of paying for views became available on YouTube and Facebook. Hence, based on this experience, it is safe to assert that YouTube has evolved to favour conventionality rather than innovation while limiting the chances of reaching followers and getting new ones.

Nonetheless, one of the benefits of YouTube that have persisted, and it is still an advantage it offers over social media platforms' video uploading options, is its capacity to work as an archive of content. As Burgues & Green (2018: 136) assert, YouTube has gone beyond simply being a repository for video content; YouTube has become "a living and growing record of the popular culture of the Internet." The archiving possibilities of YouTube made us, Radio COCOA, realise that, through its video content, it was doing more than simply disseminating music.

Alternative media and independent music as cultural heritage

In 2014, after producing a series of live music sessions and video clips, Radio COCOA recognised it was capturing a moment of the local independent scene. In other words, the project realised it was contributing to building a memory of independent music. Indeed, documenting this marginalised cultural scene became vital. Because of local media conservatism, documentations of the previous decades of independent music are incredibly scarce. Most of these archives, when they exist, are part of DIY private collections of committed

fans. That under documentation reduces the chances of Ecuadorian independent music being eventually considered cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage has multiple connotations, yet, in essence, it involves conserving and attributing value to artistic expression and materialities that represent the memory of certain groups (Brandallero & Janssen, 2014). Systematic and institutional efforts to preserve do not always happen, and as in the case of popular music, often fans carry on the mission of preserving and archiving (Stankovic, 2014). Participatory culture and today's mobile and ubiquitous technologies have expanded the possibilities of keeping what in the future may become heritage (Giaccardi, 2012). Accordingly, as independent actors have increased their capacity to preserve and record culture, the divisions between "official" and "unofficial" forms of heritage have become increasingly blurred.

Considering that Ecuadorian independent music has confronted a hostile environment, the act of documenting not only becomes testimony but an argument for its value and significance. Most of Radio COCOA content which encompassed reviews, recommendations, news, videos, and live music sessions in that regard, initially focused on emerging acts. However, when the project recognised the value that this music scene could have as heritage, it also focused on past events, precursory figures, and legacies.

An example of these is the editorial series *Archivo del Punx Ecuatoriano* [Ecuadorian Punk Archives] which on each edition explores the history behind an emblematic punk band. Emilio Samaniego, the author of the series, collaborates with an artist that illustrates the band's testimonies (Figure 29). Likewise, we have been producing editorials on figures and bands that contributed building from the underground the scene's foundations, despite not having become rock stars. Some of these figures are Pancho Jaime and Amauta, which I have already mentioned in a different chapter of this thesis, and others like Descontrolados, one of the first Ecuadorian Punk bands⁵⁶. However, not all of this work focused on artists. Many of this editorial is about prominent radio DJs, photographers, and collectors, who have been key figures of the scene in many ways and different moments.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, the articles on Pancho Jaime and Descontrolados were published on the Latin American branch of Vice.

RADIO COCOA PRESENTA

001	2	2018	PUNXS	002
TOMO	ACTA	AÑO		




Integrantes Diego Macaire (ingeniero de sonido), Marko Rivera (ingeniero de sonido), Santiago Vergara (ingeniero de sonido), Juan Carlos Gómez (psicólogo)

Miembros pasados Byron Guaña, David Gracia, David Ibarra **Año debut 1998**

Género Punk-Rock / Rock and Roll **Status** Active! **Videos** Muertos Vivos y Descontrolados te almas

Giras y conciertos memorables Festival "A Espaldas del Norte" edición 2003, Rockabillos edición 2002, corriendo a los legendarios EUKZ de España, una de las mayores influencias para la banda. En 2004 con Michael Graves, también en 2004 con Ejecución Pist Mortal. La banda cuenta, además, con una gira por la provincia de El Oro en 2004 y otra por Cumbaz en el año 2005.

¿Cómo empezó la banda y dónde se conocieron? Se conocieron en el la California Alta, barrio donde Marko y Diego vivían. Con los años, Diego entró a estudiar Simón en el IANP, Marko inició sus estudios en la misma carrera, al igual que David y Santiago quienes fueron parte de las primeras formaciones de la banda. Así crearon Sico Records, estudio y sello con el cual han grabado y publicado su prolífica producción.

Discos *Solo bocanamos diversión (demo 2000)*, *Sinagra (2000)*, *Antipáticos (2002)*, *Rock & Roll (2003)*, *Más allá del bien y del mal (2005)* *compilatorio*, *En vivo y en directo (2006)*, *Cuentos entre truenos, fracasos y recuperaciones (2006)*, *En vivo y en directo 2 (concierto por sus 10 años 2008)*, *El blues de los sedados (2008)*, *Regimen (2008)*, *Mucho de nada (2010)*, *Album en proceso - no publicado (2010)*.



Figure 29. Sample images of what comes in every edition of *Archivo del Pux Ecuatoriano* [Ecuadorian Punk Archives]. They are images of the archive of the punk band Descontrolados

In the same spirit of fostering cultural value to the scene's past, Radio COCOA has focused on doing so with the current and emerging. An example of this is the Postlatino produced by Miguel Loor. The podcast focuses on the connections between traditional and independent music. Each episode has an artist reflecting on the sound and telling the story behind a specific track (Loor,

2018). Similarly, in a more transmedial format, Radio COCOA constantly produces specials that include editorials and videos on artists or albums that come from a wide variety of styles (Figures 30 & 31). Finally, the project also produces short video documentaries on small scenes or events like festivals and gigs.

Los Chigualeros: de Esmeraldas para el mundo

comunicación | Radio COCOA | 1 | 27 de agosto 2018

Cuando la música independiente deja de sorprendernos y sus sonidos parecen repetirse, cuando pierde esa capacidad de confrontar a su público y se vuelve digerible, entonces es momento de mover los oídos a otros lugares para encontrar ruidos capaces de resolver nuestras entrañas y revelar sentidos profundos. Para hacerlo, nos acostumbramos a hacer búsquedas en internet para ubicar a los artistas que están generando vanguardia y que aún no se han ensuciado por el mercado y su sistemática de domesticación. Con cada hallazgo nos sentimos especiales por poder valorar algo que la mayoría desconoce y es incapaz de entender. Esa estrategia, aunque útil, no es la única opción. A veces, para «re-encontrarse» con la música no hay que buscar en el internet por respuestas que están a miles de kilómetros de distancia, a veces las respuestas están en lugares mucho más cercanos.

En Esmeraldas, la música se siente distinta, parece que está en todas partes y que es parte de todos sus habitantes. Es tan cotidiana que prácticamente se puede escuchar en todas sus calles y a casi cualquier hora del día. No es extraño ver a alguien que espontáneamente da pasos de baile mientras camina; sus habitantes parecen sudar ritmo. En este lugar, la música es la fórmula perfecta que convierte penas en alegría y adversidad en dignidad.

Segundo Quintero, director de Los Chigualeros, prefiere el nosotros al yo. Cree que el músico es un mediador, un vocero que habla y expresa lo que pasa y lo que se siente en su comunidad. Para Segundoillo, esta orquesta no es un proyecto personal, es una familia, una institución que no muere con él, un proyecto que tiene una vida propia y que vivirá en sus estudiantes, en los jóvenes a quienes brinda su conocimiento musical junto con otros miembros de la orquesta. Hace poco más de 30 años, cuando formó la agrupación, buscó diluir una fusión de sonidos ancestrales otros como chigualos y arruyos con son montuno. Eventualmente, en la fórmula se incluyó el sonido contemporáneo de la salsa, pero la misión sería siempre la misma: compartir su receta, la receta de su pueblo, con el mundo entero.

“No es suficiente a alguien que espantaron: modo de pasar de baile musical con otros: sus habitantes parecen sudar ritmo”.

“...no puedo hacer más. Mi problema es que yo, soy yo. No puedo dejar de ser yo”.



En la previa de uno de los ensayos de la agrupación, los más experimentados se juntan en el patio interior de la casa de Segundoillo. Por su lado, los miembros más jóvenes llegan en motocicletas y se congregan en la vereda. El compañerismo y el contraste generacional, efectivamente, dan la sensación de que se trata de una reunión familiar antes que un ensayo. Armando Palomino, una de las voces principales de la banda y miembro veterano, se acerca con total sutileza y con cara de angustia, cuenta uno de sus problemas: “La gente me dice que canto igualito a Héctor Lavoe y que soy idéntico a Oscar de León. Me dicen: ‘Palomino, vaya a la tele y gane plata imitando a esos dos’. Pero yo les digo que no puedo hacer eso. Mi problema es que yo, soy yo. No puedo dejar de ser yo”.

“...no puedo hacer más. Mi problema es que yo, soy yo. No puedo dejar de ser yo”.

Figure 30. Capture of the editorial special on Los Chigualeros, an Ecuadorian son and salsa orchestra with a base of Afroecuadorian traditional sounds. The special, besides texts, has two video interviews and a video-clip for the song Añoranzas.



Figure 31. Capture of the editorial special on the album Portales by the metal band Colapso. The special, besides texts, has four video interviews on the elements that made the album.

In coming up with new strategies to increase the potential value of our work as heritage, Radio COCOA recently decided to direct some of its efforts towards the offline. Most of its content, specifically the editorial ones, are available only for a limited time after being shared on social

media. Going back to them is not necessarily straightforward. The project experiences showed that the web is effective for immediacy, but most content dilutes immediately. Hence, social media and media web pages are not necessarily the most effective ways to arrange the information for archival purposes. Therefore, to confront the issue and symbolically create non-disposable content, Radio COCOA launched a printed publication that could be easily archived in personal and institutional libraries.

The publication is R-ZINE, and, as its name indicates, it follows the zine tradition. However, the size and weight will be similar to a book's size rather than a zine, which is usually a disposable publication. Indeed, to potentiate the value of the publication as an object, it is creatively designed to be visually pleasing with illustrations and an unconventional layout (Figure 32). R-ZINE is planned to be a yearly publication, focusing on a specific topic for each edition. The current one reflects on the connections and collapses between independent music and tradition, and a second volume on independent women artists is in the works.

Altogether, these efforts have aimed at validating independent culture in a context that has traditionally rejected it. These sense-making and memory-building practices also aim at expanding a sense of local identity. Most Ecuadorian independent music represents diverse emerging expressions of the younger generations rethinking conventionalities and the place they inhabit and share in many ways. Radio COCOA's mission as a media has been to counter its marginalisation and amplify its voices. As Giaccardi (2012:5) asserts, "heritage artifacts and practices not only constitute a legacy to future generations, but they also play a crucial role in shaping our sense of place and identity".



Figure 32. R-Zine's first volume cover

Alternative media as critical media.

In the previous sections, I described how beyond spreading independent music, Radio COCOA has also contributed to further spreading the meanings and significance of local independent music. However, in the last two years the project started focusing on developing strategies to amplify critical ideas the scene has traditionally tackled. Following Fuch and Sandoval (2010), “alternative” and “critical” are not the same as being an alternative to the mainstream is not necessarily an act of confronting cultural hierarchies. For instance, today’s most popular local indie bands are leaning towards more aesthetic explorations. As a result, the irreverent tone characteristic of the previous decades has fade away to a certain extent. Hence, as a strategy to compensate for the decreased counter-cultural impetus, Radio COCOA has produced content focused on projects with a more critical approach. This process required noticing newer emerging acts that often bring edgier and more experimental sounds. At the same time, the

contents, which for a while focused more on indie music, now get balanced with edgier styles like hip-hop and metal more periodically.

Another way of doing critical media through independent music has been connecting it with specific causes. For the last three years, during March, the month in which the women's march takes place in Ecuador, Radio COCOA launched a series of content that focused on the work of local women artists. The most emblematic product is a series of live sessions that feature women artists entitled *Pisando Firme. Música for the 8M* [On solid ground. Music for the 8M]. The purpose of selecting the artists, locations, and songs is to communicate feminist messages (Figure 33).



Figure 33. Frames of the live session of hip-hop artist Selva 7 and her song *Mariposas*. All of the 8M series sessions started with a feminist message that explained the meaning of the location in which the session was shot. This session happened in the countryside on a crop field. At the beginning of the session, the message was, “Women’s struggle has been a fight for the land because the land must belong to those that work it. For the right to access water and the moorland because they belong to those who drink, breathe, and protect them. Women’s fight is a fight against mining, a fight that inevitably turns our land, resources, and existence into our own bodies.” The director of these sessions is Manuela Vásquez.

In 2020, Radio COCOA also launched the first *Sesiones al Natural* [Nature Sessions] to promote environmental awareness through music. The locations for these sessions are unique but endangered forest and nature reservations of Ecuador. The performances required to be acoustic, and the intention is to use music as a vehicle to inform and sensitise conservation initiatives (Figure 34).

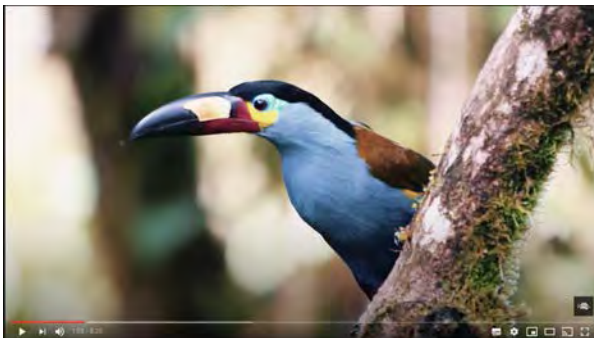
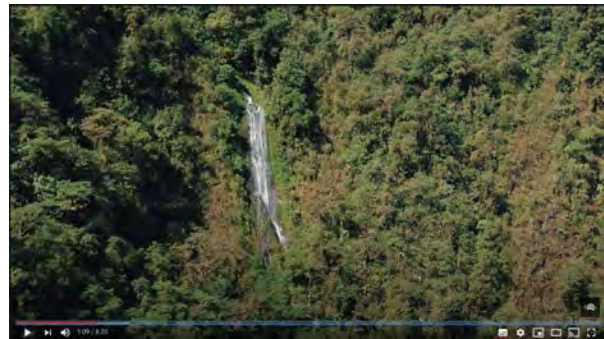
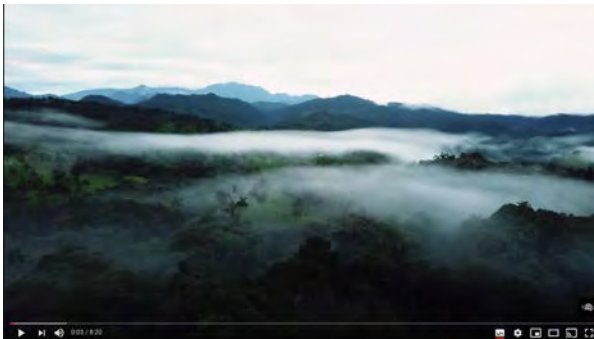


Figure 34. Frames from the first *Sesiones al Natural* shot in the Andean Chocó, the most biodiverse cloud forest in the world.

Finally, a significant series of Radio COCOA efforts that show the social awareness of the project started in 2017 when it began supporting small music and art festivals that follow social and environmental causes. Some of these festivals have been: Canoa Fest, Chocó Fest, *Indómita* and *Fiesta de Colores*. Most of them aim at bringing art in the form of music, murals,

and street art to vulnerable rural communities with little access to circuits of culture. These festivals are community-based, meaning that they involve local communities in putting up the events. However, it is worth mentioning that these are not the most popular content. Finding the balance between catchy and meaningful content has been a challenging task.

Brief reflections on media practice as research

Ten years ago, shortly after finishing and publishing my master's degree dissertation on the local hardcore and metal scene, I started questioning the use and significance of this kind of publication. The affection towards the scene motivated me in the first place to try to understand it even further. Moreover, I thought that a thesis was an opportunity to document and disseminate its value. Yet, I was unsure of the kind of impact an ethnographic thesis on a music scene could have outside academic contexts. The study of local contemporary popular music is rare in the region, so I did not have references to suggest what to expect. That uncertainty made me refocus my interests in supporting local independent music to other fronts. It was then when, after just getting hired as a university lecturer, I was invited by the School's Dean, Hugo Burgos, to be part of Radio COCOA as a media producer.

After a decade of being part of the project, I noticed that media production results are almost immediately palpable. Each content published has been a way to support a band, a project, or an event, and the results are evident. However, this has not made me discredit the value of producing scholarly work. On the contrary, my involvement with Radio COCOA never stopped being motivated by academic curiosity. The experience of my master's degree dissertation made me realise that I was trying to answer a bigger question: what can be done to push local independent music? My colleagues and I have been answering this question for over a decade from a media practice perspective. At the same time, I have kept trying to answer this question from an academic perspective.

Radio COCOA has become a research project that has constantly found ways to innovate through digital media while seeking to push and spread independent Ecuadorian music. As a collective effort, the project has generated knowledge about Ecuadorian music while finding ways to disseminate it. Furthermore, for me, the experience of being part of it while producing

scholarly work on local popular music became two dimensions of the same aim. In that sense, my practice has informed this research, and the process of doing this thesis has constantly been informing Radio COCOA's media practice. Indeed, many of the subjects, issues, and people tackled in the previous chapters have been part of my media practice and this scholarly study of independent music. Thus, in this case, practice and research have often coexisted and entangled together. After all, as already mentioned, producing media and producing scholarly work could generate and disseminate knowledge, although they imply different output formats and speak to different kinds of audiences. Moreover, as Jasman & Levy (2012) assert, one of research from creative practice's most significant aims is to inform the practice of others. Thus, I hope that the insights from practice I have presented in this chapter could contribute to informing other media practitioners on aspects of alternative media, independent music promotion, and digital media.

Final considerations and a reflection on scale

This chapter studied the evolution of alternative media dedicated to independent music in Ecuador. It followed the shift from offline to internet-based alternative media practices. As the early decades were a hostile and repressive period for local independent music, offline media played a significant role in spreading independent music. In the new millennium, the popularisation of the internet brought new possibilities for producing media. Lower production costs and overall accessibility of internet-based participatory media made it accessible to non-professional and independent producers to create media specialised in local independent music. An emblematic example of this is Radio COCOA, which, as asserted, for ten years has been spreading local independent music from the web.

In presenting and reflecting on the experience of doing Radio COCOA, I went through many dimensions of what alternative media can achieve from a Global South perspective. In this sense, Radio COCOA has materialised many of the potentialities of alternative media in the current digital media environments. Some of those have adopted and adapted the participatory and transmedia features that the digital came to offer to further and creatively spread independent music. Likewise, Radio COCOA eventually started focusing on strategies to communicate local independent music's cultural value and legacy apart from spreading. Part of

the mediation process has been producing media highlighting the critical impulse that has traditionally moved independent music. Being a project funded by the Universidad San Francisco de Quito has allowed Radio COCOA to exist in a non-commercial realm. This particularity has also fostered creative freedom focused on innovation that conventional media platforms that rely on commercial activities to subsist usually do not have.

However, while Radio COCOA has certainly helped to spread, expanded a sense of community, and contributed to increasing the cultural value of local independent music, its impact, in terms of scale, is still, after ten years, very niche. That is an unavoidable issue.

As Fuch and Sandoval (2010:143) assert, the small-scale impact is problematic because it may reveal that alternative media do not threaten the dominant “cooperative media powers”. In the specific case of producing media independently, this becomes especially problematic. Artist subsistence relies on selling tickets, getting paid for performing, monetising stream plays, and selling records and merch. Increasing the audiences equals growing the possibilities to bring benefits to the artists and those involved in the recording and live performing aspects of the scene. In other words, further exposure potentiates the cultural impact of independent music and potentially reinforces the subsistence of those that produce it. Achieving that stability is something that alternative media practices in Ecuador have not accomplished to a significant extent. This short reach does not mean that alternative media have not played an important role in supporting the independent scene.

For Radio COCOA, the mission has continuously been increasing the audiences without neglecting the independent integrity of the music. Yet this has been a tricky and complex mission facing increasingly adverse conditions. As argued in the previous chapter, the datafication of culture on the web and the fusion between prevalent music streaming and the recording industry have increasingly benefited the international and commercial over the local and independent.

Hence, producing alternative media for and about local independent music has, in this context, been a mission that has implied confronting prevalent local and global hegemonies. In this way, alternative media practices could become a local response to the world’s globalising and imperialistic cultural logic. And while Radio COCOA and other similar alternative media projects until now may have failed to take independent music to massive audiences, they, at the very least, have contributed to generating and sustaining a base audience. Equally important is that

they have played a significant role in creating content that leaves traces of the potential legacy of these independent music cultures, a significant contribution, considering that marginalised cultures have often been neglected.

Epilogue

What is Ecuadorian Independent music, and why does it matter?

This thesis studied the music cultures that constitute what is locally considered Ecuadorian independent music. Rock, pop, hip hop, and electronic music, styles that emerged in Anglo-phonetic northern geographies, have travelled the world and been incorporated into the everyday lives of multiple geographies (Conell & Gibson, 2003). Ecuador has not been the exception, so this study aimed to explore the specific meanings of the independent music cultures around such genres in Ecuador. In that sense, it focused on how global music cultures constantly mutate into local ones. Accordingly, the aim was to demonstrate that globalisation, capitalism, and the continuum of colonialism are echoed in the contemporary music experiences of Ecuador. However, it also claimed that global popular music could transform into a resistance vehicle. The significance of independent music cultures in Ecuador is tied to its counter-cultural dynamics.

From Ecuadorian rock to the newer electronic ensembles that incorporate traditional sounds, Ecuadorian independent music has continuously discovered ways to mix global and local cultures while rebelling against a conservative political class, fostering critical nationalisms, and actively finding new ways to embrace neglected cultural heritages. In other words, Ecuadorian independent music cultures reflect the resilience of the local and traditional.

The first style and the base of Ecuadorian independent music cultures is rock music which germinated in the early 1970s. The adoption of rock enabled an underground music culture that confronted the power and, as a consequence, it was openly repressed and stigmatised by local authorities and the media. The killing of Pancho Jaime and the arrests of Jaime Guevara, emblematic rock pioneers, and the multiple episodes of harassment towards rock fans in live shows and the streets, are proof of what independent music has represented in Ecuador.

In addition to the repressive environment, local rock cultures lacked proper conditions for producing music independently. Ecuador's peripheral situation and political and economic

instability made it difficult to access appropriate instruments, venues, recording technologies, and distribution channels. Despite these adversities, Ecuadorian rock kept evolving into an alternative space from which young generations of Ecuadorians have raised their voices while proposing an alternative view of their national identity. Entering the new millennium, the rock scene, at the time known as “*movimiento rockero*”, started incorporating a new range of sound and aesthetics. Cable television and then the arrival of the internet contribute to creating a more diverse range of sounds. As a result, hip-hop, electronic, and more eclectic music influences joined rock to make up what is now known as the “*escena independiente*” [independent scene].

As local independent music expanded to other global styles, it also started exploring and incorporating local indigenous, black, and mestizo traditions⁵⁷. The hybrid compound of international styles from Anglo-European geographies and local and regional traditions that made up Ecuadorian independent music in the new millennium demonstrated that it was more than an import. These emerging music cultures became a space from which to critically imagine an alternative sense of locality. However, the emergence and expansion of this music culture keep facing structural limitations.

Ecuador has increasingly been consuming foreign forms of music since the 1970s, and this tendency has only grown with digital media. As globalisation expands, most of the population moves away from local music cultures. The remains of what is assumed local/national/traditional are tied to the past, which indicates a lack of contemporary music the majority of the population recognise as authentically national. In that sense, Wong (Ibid.: 211) claims that *música nacional*⁵⁸ is a compound “of Ecuadorian and non-Ecuadorian music which at some point have been considered (or labelled) *música nacional*”. The repertoire of music that makes up what is considered Ecuadorian independent (rock, pop, metal, hardcore, hip hop, electronic, jazz, reggae, cumbia, salsa, etc.) has not been – at least not institutionally or at a vast scale – considered Ecuadorian. Not even after five decades of Ecuadorian rock being present in the country. Although Ecuadorian independent music cultures evolved to build bridges between tradition and contemporaneity, they have remained marginal even within the national context between the global and local. But, why?

⁵⁷ The inclusion of such traditions started in the 1970s but consolidated by the end of the 1990s. Early examples, as mentioned in chapter 4, are Amauta, Promesas Temporales, Jaime Guevara, and Tahual.

⁵⁸ When Wong speaks of *música nacional* she is referring to music cultures perceived as traditional Ecuadorian music.

In the epilogue for her study of “*música nacional*”, Wong (2012: 219) offers some clues to understand this disconnection when she asserts,

I view the pervasive images of loss in Ecuadorian popular music reflecting the feelings of upper-middle- and lower-class mestizos who seem to live a life of constant simulacrum, striving to hide their indigenous heritage and thus experiencing and identifying with sentiments of loss.

The lack of interest of Ecuadorians in their traditional and new local music cultures reveals the prevalence of a conservative and anachronic notion of nationalism and collective rejection of the country’s indigenous roots. Typically, nationalism has implied a sort of anti-cosmopolitanism and has operated as a top-down ideology (Ahmed, 2017). Nationalism, in other words, is often viewed as static, essentialist, and restrictive. Then it is clear that those perspectives over nationalism permeate the contemporary perception of Ecuadorian music. Furthermore, the self-denial and condescendence that Wong points out in her study of *musica nacional* are still prevalent in the disposition towards emerging independent music cultures. Therefore, what counts as national can only be about looping the past, and it is inconsequential with the present, even when it is renewed. Hence, in the general conception of what counts as authentically Ecuadorian, innovation, hybridity, and contemporaneity are denied.

Throughout this thesis, the findings I present lead me to argue that Ecuadorian Independent music has been countering that self-denial and inferiority complex Wong points out. Indeed, as the product of global influences, local independent music has increasingly generated a “cosmopolitan nationalism”. That is an approach in which the global mixes with the local to “help minimize both the dangerous exclusivist potential of nationalism and the Eurocentric nature of universalism” (Voronkova, 2010:2).

Ecuadorian independent music struggles and thrives in its paradoxes. It has been strategically moving towards the future without breaking ties with the past. It has managed to turn the global into the local while building bridges that connect modernity with tradition. It has established an alternative path for the newer generations of Ecuadorians to reclaim their contemporaneity and neglected heritage critically. It has become a space that promotes free expression against power and oppression, and it keeps finding ways to revalue Ecuadorian cultural heritage while keeping contemporary cultures moving. For these reasons, Ecuadorian independent music matters, and it does despite not being widely accepted as authentically national and despite the

world not knowing about it. Lack of international reach is indeed a core preoccupation of this work.

A Global South critique of the music industry in the 21st century

Music distribution worldwide relies on the music industry, media corporations, and digital platforms. Global South regions like Latin America are peripheries in these systems of distribution. Hence, to critically and adequately study Ecuador's peripheral condition, in chapter 7, I reflected on what it has represented for the global music industry. In that regard, Ecuador's situation went from being a remote island with restrictive access to international forms of music in a pre-digital distribution age to a strict consumer (not producer) of popular music in the digital age. In other words, the transition from physical to digital systems of music distribution has not become a significantly more democratic and inclusive environment. Global North corporations and anglophone music keep expanding their global dominance over the music from small peripheral nations like Ecuador.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, access to international forms of music was minimal. Music recordings from the US or the UK or specialised media about it were hard to obtain. Collecting these materials was mostly informally carried out by fans that imported recordings and magazines, and there was a limited catalogue of licensed mainstream pop music recordings printed locally. By the mid-1990s, cable television and the emergence of the Latin branch of MTV enabled local access to alternative forms of music from the UK, the US, and for the first time, from other Latin countries, mainly Argentina, Chile, and Mexico.

As shown in chapter 7, in the 2000s, the emergence and rapid expansion of so-called digital piracy brought about significant changes. Branches of international records stores like Tower Records, which arrived in 1999, closed their doors in 2004 as piracy thrived worldwide. Ironically, access to the country's internet connection during this decade was minimal and thus benefited the emergence and fast expansion of a street-based pirate market based on selling unlicensed digital copies of music recordings and movies. This form of piracy in Ecuador was approached as a complex phenomenon that demands overcoming the mainstream narrative that piracy equals theft. For instance, piracy represented an opportunity for Ecuadorian

audiences to access culture worldwide without the mediation and restrictions that global entertainment industries impose. Yet, it was evident that most products were still Anglo-European popular culture. For local artists, the effects of piracy were much more complex.

Before piracy became a vast market, local artists, independent or not, had reduced chances to record and distribute their music domestically or internationally. In addition to a hostile environment, that lack of access generated very adverse conditions for new and edgy forms of music to thrive. Local rock and pop artists very exceptionally recorded in proper conditions, and when they did, they lacked a distribution structure. Even pop artists with radio-friendly and innocuous sounds had a minimal local reach. Independent music presence was minimal in the local mass media, and so, it primarily relied on live shows and peer-to-peer distribution.

In this context, the internet and the proliferation of pirate markets did not represent enormous consequences for the independent scene in the 2000s. The vast majority of independent artists were not making substantial earnings from selling records. If anything, the most damaging effect of digital piracy for independent artists was hypothetical. Piracy might have closed the door for any chance of making profits from selling records, but there is no certainty that that would happen. However, piracy was a less restrictive method for reaching audiences. Indeed, this strategy worked for the tecnocumbia scene, but the benefits were insignificant for independent music.

However, the 2000s were a period when independent music in Ecuador flourished in sounds and new aesthetics. To a certain extent, the less restrictive access to a broader range of music styles that the internet and piracy facilitated during this period contributed to the independent scene's diversification and sophistication. Indeed, this decade also saw the emergence of massive independent music festivals such as Quitofest. I must mention that digital technologies also made the production of high-quality recordings more accessible. Yet, profiting from selling records was no longer a possibility due to piracy, and the media coverage for this music culture remained reduced.

Piracy was still thriving early in the 2010s, but social media and streaming platforms such as Youtube enabled new distribution channels for emerging independent acts. These

internet-based tools compensate for the lack of presence in local mass media and generate a direct connection between the artists and the fans. Yet, social media and streaming have continuously changed, and while they certainly expanded the scene, they eventually proved they have also imposed limitations.

The popularisation of freemium models of streaming services such as Spotify revealed that the internet is not beneficial for independent acts from Ecuador. While local artists can distribute their music and gain some remuneration, the platform does not facilitate further exposure. On the contrary, its algorithmic and human-based methods of curation favour mainstream music. As music worldwide turns to streaming platforms as the primary distribution system, the recording industry's hegemony remains or arguably expands. Thus, streaming corporations have established themselves as powerful new mediators that have reinstated the dominance of major labels.

From critique to action: notes from alternative media experience

Internet-based technologies still represent an opportunity for independent cultures. Nonetheless, despite internet-based tools to produce media content remaining relatively accessible, the increasing cooperative logic of the web supposes an unfavourable scenario for alternative forms of media. As explored in chapter 8, DIY media committed to promoting and documenting the scene from the web emerged throughout the last decade. These local media initiatives have turned to social media and streaming platforms to disseminate content about and for the scene. In that sense, local alternative media have assumed the mission of partially compensating for the lack of presence and dissemination of independent music in conventional media outlets.

To explore the potentialities of alternative digital media in Ecuador, I shared and reflected on my experience in being part of Radio COCOA. Being part of the project has allowed me to foster this scene daily while continuously designing innovative and more effective ways to communicate, promote, and document it. Furthermore, Radio COCOA has gone beyond straightforwardly promoting and documenting. The project has recently produced media that connects the music's meanings with local cultural diversity, gender equality, and environmental awareness. Thus, positioning myself from Radio COCOA has involved making sense of independent music, digging into its meanings, and communicating them to enhance its legacy.

In this way, media practice and popular music research became complementary aspects of the mission. The inclusion of the Radio COCOA experience in this thesis reflects expanding academic endeavour. Thus, the critique of local independent music is complemented by media strategies and actions to confront them.

A recurrent ethical consideration for any ethnographic process is to foresee the effects that representation about a community could have on the same community. This concern comes from the possibility of creating misleading or derogatory representations of peripheral or vulnerable human groups (Muratorio, 2015). In that regard, contextually and horizontally representing Ecuadorian independent music has been the basis of what I do on an everyday basis beyond this thesis. However, the music culture's adverse conditions speak of a need for developing more effective strategies to push, support, and document Ecuadorian independent music from and beyond academic research and media practice.

What is next?

My main motivation for carrying out this research was to produce insightful information about a scene that, as all Ecuadorian cultures, is pretty much invisible for most of the world. Through the different discussions that make up this work, I aimed at fostering ideas to justify the validation of the scene and, in that way, to dig into the obscure, neglected, and peripheral. That implied evidencing the world's structures that relegate certain cultures while hyper-exposing others, further expanding and reinforcing global asymmetries. That way, I attempted to study independent music to confront its imminent oblivion and the geopolitical logics that marginalise it. Cultural studies of contemporary Global South music culture remain scarce. There is a noticeable need to expand the investigations on peripheral cultures. So, what could be done to further boost Latin American popular music studies? Moreover, what would be the benefit of doing it?

The social inequality, political instability, and overall lack of resources (dispossession) characteristic of Global South contexts reflect the lack of impulse and studies that culture and arts from these contexts get (Shome, 2019: 197). Regional and local scholarly production that studies the region's arts and culture, especially emerging forms of culture, is scarce, fragmented, and inconsistent. Indeed, cultural studies scholarship from and about the Global

South context has “minimal presence” (Ibid.: 198). Consequently, the body of work on popular music cultures from a region like Latin America is exceptional and does not get enough regional or global distribution. As Gonzáles (2018:22) concludes in a literary review of Latin American popular music's scholarly production: "We Latin Americans do not know much about Latin America".

In Global South contexts like Ecuador, arts and culture are in a perpetual precarious and vulnerable state. Considering that arts and culture are knowledge, allowing this vulnerability implies generating what De Sousa Santos (2014) calls “epistemicide”. Preserving music traditions and impulsing emerging ones should be common sense, but culture is often neglected and even repressed. As argued in different sections of this work, traditional cultures are often reduced to anachronic evidence of a romanticised past. Likewise, emerging cultures are considered dangerous or just a fad. Their value and ability to resist and transform the present are rarely considered, but that is what this thesis tries to confront.

It is debatable that cultural research should follow a specific practical use, and the very definition of what is useful could not be generalised (Fredriksson & Johannisson 2009: 9). However, some of the expected functions of researching culture are to inform and motivate creating better and more just policies to sustain and protect cultural and artistic practices. For instance, the argument of chapter 7 (streaming platforms obscuring local music while expanding the penetration of international forms of music) could be used to argue the urgency of creating policies to regulate the use of these platforms in the country. Likewise, academic validation could become an argument favouring considering certain cultural expressions legit when a music culture lacks commercial success or massive acceptance. In other words, academic validation of this music scene could, in that sense, contribute to breaking stereotypes and unfounded judgments.

A common counter-argument against cultural studies as an academic practice is that they are often disconnected from the general interests and enclosed in the academic contexts (Fredriksson & Johannisson 2009). A valid critique; nevertheless, this is not necessarily an attack on Cultural Studies but on a scholarly tradition that has neglected other forms of socialising information beyond academic papers. This lack of diversity of formats could, indeed, be considered contradictory to its philosophical premise of questioning hegemonies.

As Shome (2019) argues, there is a need to redesign Cultural Studies to be more inclusive by incorporating other forms of expression like plastic arts, oral narratives, performance, dances, and other writing styles. The purpose of having different outputs is to disseminate the knowledge to connect and impact much wider audiences beyond the academy and beyond disciplines. Accordingly, my process of producing this thesis was parallel to my role as a media practitioner focused on creating content to disseminate further, document, and mediate local independent music in creative ways. As mentioned in chapter 8, I have approached this thesis and my media practice as complementary aspects of the same process. Thus, to better understand and empower local popular music, it is imperative to encourage new and innovative forms of research.

Beyond the benefits that research like this could foster in terms of policy and validation for its context, studying this obscure and underexplored culture could generate external benefits. Presenting cultural and popular music studies in contexts different from their own could further expand Cultural Studies and Popular Music Studies. In other words, considering that Anglo-European geographies produce most research on these areas and about their own cultures, integrating research about scenes from and about Global South contexts could contribute to building heterogenic and more inclusive academic environments. Although, this is not granted. Further institutional investments, funding, and strategies need to be developed. Language could also be a significant impediment, but translations and research staff exchanges and dialogues between North and South and South with South could be beneficial in nurturing that diversity.

As a white-mestizo Ecuadorian, Ecuadorian independent music represents me. In many ways and over time, this music has made me aware of my heritage – its contradictions and values. It has confronted me with the context I inhabit. It has nurtured a critical way of thinking of my heritage, nationality, and the social and political state of the world and my country. The way the world is structured and, ironically, my own culture has conspired to neglect my mixed heritage and sense of locality. Attali (2009) highlights music's prophetic capabilities. Following that idea, I am not sure that pushing independent music cultures guarantees a better or more just future.

However, I am convinced that it is essential to creating a tomorrow. I hope that this work and the ten years I have dedicated my efforts to create content on the independent scene with the Radio COCOA team serve to protect and expand the legacy of our (music) cultures.

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