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# Mapping the city from below: Approaches in charting out Latinx historical and quotidian presence in metropolitan Los Angeles: 1990–2020

## **ABSTRACT**

*How do marginalized ethnic communities assert their presence in the American urban space? This article examines maps and location descriptions found in 'Rock Angelino' concert flyers, lyrics of songs, and spoken word multimedia pieces as examples of 'mapping from below' practices from the 1990s to the near present, which Latinxs have used to place themselves in the historical geography and cultural imaginary of Los Angeles. While people of Latin American descent have been part of Los Angeles since its founding, their presence has often been neglected and diminished in the maps created by government agencies, and in more recent times, by gentrifying real estate enterprises that inaccurately portray the past and present of Los Angeles as a White space with few selective geographical locations*

## **KEYWORDS**

ephemeral forums  
historical memory  
Latinxs Los Angeles  
Los Olvidados  
mapping from below  
Rock Angelino  
Viva Padilla

*of communities of colour. By employing critical geography and cultural history methodologies, this piece demonstrates how Latinxs have been cartographers of their own communities. Most significantly how Latinxs employed their words and sounds as mapping tools with which to chart, examine, narrate and make visible the rich layered histories of Latinxs and communities of colour in Southern California.*

A joke often told within Southern California Latinx communities is that while most Latinxs do not believe that international borders should separate people, we sure can argue for hours about the exact boundaries that demarcate Boyle Heights from unincorporated East Los Angeles, all the way to the street number that mark each of these historically Chicanx communities. The jest might attempt to indicate the contradiction between questioning nation/state borders, while also being engrossed with identifying the borderlines within US Latinxs urban neighbourhoods. Thus, this humorous contradiction alludes to a more thoughtful matter: defining the boundaries and the geographical features of Latinxs communities and in effect, the socio-economic and racial areas of belonging and exclusion within the US metropolis has long been of practical interest for Latin American immigrants and US-born Latinxs.

In their historical and contemporary everyday lives, Latinxs live, labour and move through neighbourhoods and public spaces that were created by laws, regulations and socio-economic forces intent on segregating Whites from non-Whites throughout the twentieth century. As Andrea Gibbons (Gibbons 2018), Josh Sides (Sides 2006), Eric Avila (Avila 2004) and a cadre of Los Angeles historians demonstrate in their studies, federal housing policy played a critical role in creating and reinforcing racial and class bias in Southern California where communities of colour have been segregated into marginalized, underserved and overpoliced neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, Latinx immigrants and US-born Latinxs have long created their own cartographical approaches to map and understand their communities, to describe the social topography, to define and expand the boundaries of their communities. Most significantly, they have used a multitude of mapping practices to assert their presence within the American metropolises in what Johnson defines 'spatial entitlement' through everyday resistance and cooperation between other racialized communities in a city that continually marginalized them (Johnson 2013: xii–xiii).

Hence, this article examines maps and location descriptions found in three different forms of cultural expressions created by Latinxs in Los Angeles that provide a series of mapping 'snapshots' of the last three decades, in which Latinxs have become the demographic majority of Southern California. These are the flyers for 1990s 'Rock Angelino' concerts, the lyrics of songs written and in Spanish in the 1990s and 2000s, and a more recent 2020 poem in the form of a multimedia piece. The early 1990s flyers were created by and for a predominantly Latinx immigrant audience who had to contend with navigating the urban space as newly arrived Angelenos. These songs also chronicle their journeys on the streets and freeways and their liberatory potential to be used for more than transportation, during their times of leisure. In addition, the lyrics examined here also narrate the anguish of lacking legal migratory status and the ingenuity that undocumented Latinxs resort to present themselves as documented within the city. These lines reflect the increased

anti-immigrant policies and threats of incarceration and deportation undocumented immigrants faced during this era. Written by a second-generation Mexican-American poet, the contemporary multimedia piece charts out Latinx urban spaces in formerly White suburbs. The piece also delves on the consequences of systemic racism and lack of affordable housing, which threatens to uproot Latinxs and other communities of colour out of Los Angeles. Taken together, these cultural productions are examples of ‘mapping from below’ practices, which Latinxs have used to place themselves as part of Los Angeles in the near past and the present.

While people of Latin American descent have been part of Los Angeles since its founding, their presence has often been neglected and diminished in the maps created by government agencies, tourism agencies, and in more recent times, by gentrifying real estate enterprises, and modern-day boosters that seek to reaffirm the White spatial imaginary in central Los Angeles with redevelopment efforts that displace communities of colour, while building high-priced housing along simulated public space areas that allude to a mythic, yet inaccurate bohemian White vision of the city’s past. Building upon the definition of counter mapping by Nancy Peluso (Peluso 1995), I define mapping from below as a self and collective cartographic endeavour in which everyday people, in this case Latinxs – some of them recent immigrants, others US-born and lifelong Los Angeles residents – define the urban space in their own terms from their vantage point of seeing the city at the street level, yet attentive to expanding their own agency amid the limits of government policies and societal norms. In these mapping from below examples, Latinxs place and represent themselves as part of the metropolis. This in sharp contrast to the representations in government or media sources, where they are confined and static within a certain geographical area or altogether overlooked from being part of Los Angeles.

By employing critical geography methodologies and a cultural history approach, this piece demonstrates how Latinxs have been cartographers of their own communities, mapped their presence in Los Angeles, while also providing themselves and community members with visual, lyrical and textual renderings with which to examine and include the rich, layered histories of Latinxs and communities of colour in Southern California. As they create their visual or written spatial accounts, Latinx immigrants and US-born Latinxs in the near present, continue a long tradition of crafting their own cartographical approaches to map their environment, to describe the social topography, to define and expand the boundaries of their communities. Most significantly, as critical cartographers suggest, ‘maps make arguments’ (Wood and Fels 1992). Hence through their visual or written mappings, Latinxs assert themselves and their presence as visible and dynamic part of American metropolises’ urban space.

A note on terminology, while I discuss the lives and artistic creations of people who would have defined themselves as either Latinos or Latinas in the previous decades, in this article I employ the term ‘Latinx’ as an interlocking category that encompasses people of Latin American origin in the United States, which has gained currency and acceptance within US Latin American communities. Furthermore, in contrast to other terms such as Latina/o or Latin@, as Richard T. Rodriguez explains, Latinx is recent and evolving a gender-neutral term that also challenges gender binaries employed by genderqueer, gender nonconformists, activists, and intellectuals (Rodríguez 2017: 203). The gender-neutral definition is expanded in my use of the term

Chicanx, a political identity developed by Mexican Americans during the civil rights movements' period of the 1960s and whose use continues to the present in many Mexican-American communities in the American Southwest and beyond.

## THE HISTORICAL SEGREGATION OF LOS ANGELES

In the present, Los Angeles is a multi-ethnic metropolis that is often perceived as a bastion of progressive politics, which foments racial equality as it features a non-White demographic majority where its over ten million residents are comprised of 9 per cent of Black residents, 15 per cent of Asian-American residents, 48 per cent Latinxs and only 26 per cent of the Los Angeles county population identifies themselves as White.

Yet, far from being a racially integrated metropolis, the Greater Los Angeles region continues to be a mosaic of heavily segregated neighbourhoods where the racial and class divides in which they were organized at the onset of the twentieth century persist. The residential segregation along racial lines was in fact a constituting element of the urbanization of Los Angeles in the first third of the twentieth century where a multitude of neighbourhoods and cities were built to attract White newcomers lured from the Midwest and the eastern board with the promise of warm weather most of the year and plentiful of job opportunities in expanding industries (Nicolaidis 2002). African Americans who arrived in Los Angeles during the 'Great Black Migration', fleeing the racist Jim Crow regime in the South were segregated in decaying and overpopulated neighbourhoods in the south part of the city. Conversely, Mexican immigrants fleeing Mexico's 1910 Revolution were lumped together in 'colonias', or neglected neighbourhoods such as Boyle Heights where ethnic Mexicans – who had long been a part of Southern California – and other non-White immigrants were forced to reside (Gibbons 2018; Sides 2006).

In the aftermath of the Second World War and with the advent of legislation and court decisions propelled by the civil rights movement, most of the *de jure* residential segregation apparatus that organized Southern California along racial and class lines, such as racial covenants and redlining laws were rendered unlawful. As a result of lesser restrictions in legal residential segregation, Latinxs moved into formerly White working-class cities and neighbourhoods that had experienced White flight (Avila 2004). In addition, as they sought affordable housing, Latinxs began to look beyond the traditional Eastside neighbourhoods and took on residence in predominantly Black neighbourhoods in South Los Angeles and other cities within Los Angeles County, yet this did not yield in significant upward economic mobility (Rosas 2019). These trends further increased in the decades of 1980s and 1990s, a period when immigrants and US-born Latinxs became a demographic majority in the city and county of Los Angeles. Subsequently, the demographic character of Southern California has become increasingly non-White. Since the 1960s, the growth of Los Angeles County has almost been entirely comprised of non-White and non-Black groups, with Latinxs now numbering close to five million or close to 48 per cent of the total county population (Noe-Bustamante 2020).

However, while Latinxs moved into these formerly mono-racial localities and, in many instances, became the demographic majority in these areas, their presence was heavily delineated and constrained by social, racial and economic forces that had long been in place to maintain segregated

residential space along race and class lines. Moreover, the Latinx presence is commonly overlooked or ignored in what George Lipsitz defines as the 'white spatial imaginary', in Southern California that not only renders their existence at the margins of society and economic opportunities for upward mobility, but also minimizes the Latinx historical and contemporary extensive presence in the geography of Southern California and reduces it to a few neighbourhoods (Lipsitz 2011: 11–14). Often, Latinxs had to navigate tense interactions with their Black neighbours as they were systemically placed in direct competition for meagre resources. Yet as Theresa Gaye Johnson asserts, at times Latinxs and Blacks found spaces of solidarity living alongside each other in Los Angeles (Johnson 2013).

Most significantly, by analysing these hand-drawn maps, lyrics and poems created by immigrant and US Latinxs themselves, it is evident that these cartographical approaches do not merely describe and represent their surroundings. Building upon the concept of 'spatial entitlement', articulated by Johnson, which she defines 'spatial entitlement' through everyday resistance and cooperation between other racialized communities in a city that continually marginalized them (Johnson 2013: xii–xiii). I argue that Latinxs, along with other people of colour, have used mapping to proclaim their presence within the Los Angeles metropolis and make visible their presence in the urban space.

## **MAPPING MUSIC SITES IN LATINX LOS ANGELES**

The following four hand-drawn maps were included in 'Rock Angelino' flyers music shows that took place in 1993 and 1994. 'Rock Angelino' is the distinct Los Angeles version of the transnational music genre known as 'Rock Latinoamericano' or 'Rock En Español' that emerged as a Latin American music genre in the 1980s and that by the 1990s became popular in Southern California among immigrants and some US-born young Latinxs. The defining and unifying element of the music genre was the mostly exclusive use of Spanish in its lyrics. As a particular Southern California variant of the music genre, 'Rock Angelino' reflected on the reality and aspirations of Los Angeles Latinx immigrants in its lyrics, and at times also incorporated Spanglish in its songs, that demonstrated the composers' efforts to navigate between their primary language and the Southern California linguistic differences among Latinxs of different generations, as US-born Latinxs would be likely to communicate in English as their main language.

As I discuss in an earlier work, these leaflets were created to advertise events that took place in 'ephemeral forums' that is, in improvised, ad hoc spaces, often backyards, empty storefronts, and other locales throughout Southern California (Leal 2020: 124). These maps printed in easily discarded paper can be understood as short-lived ephemera. Yet, as José Esteban Muñoz compels us to consider, ephemera is the evidence for the artistic and everyday expressions of 'minoritarian subjects' where we can follow 'traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things'. In the case of the flyers for 'Rock Angelino' shows, the maps printed in them present us with cartographical renderings by young immigrants in which they deployed their understanding of the geographic and temporal boundaries of their communities and how they understood themselves as part of an emerging demographic majority, yet still constrained by decades-long legal and social residential restrictive efforts that

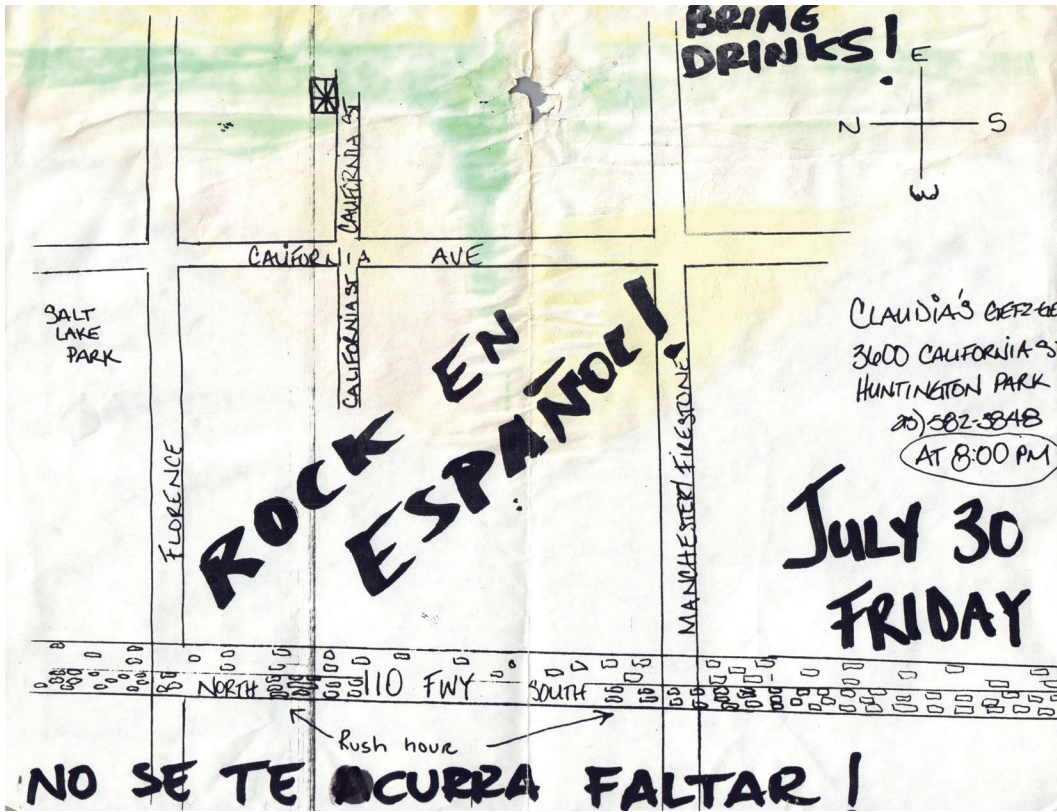


Figure 1: Map for a 'Rock en Español' backyard party at a home in Huntington Park, July 1993. Author unknown. Photograph courtesy of Jorge N. Leal/The Rock Archivo LÁ.

predated their arrival to Los Angeles, but experienced by earlier generations of Latinxs.

Consider the first flyer advertising a 1993 backyard show in the city of Huntington Park. This map provides intimate details of the streets and public infrastructure of this formerly White, working-class suburban city that is in nearby proximity in the south-east direction of Downtown Los Angeles and to the south of East Los Angeles. Whereas Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles have a decades-long presence of ethnic Mexican residents dating to the early part of the twentieth century, cities such as Huntington Park located to the south of East L.A. held a primarily White population since their inception as suburban enclaves. By the late 1970s Huntington Park began to experience an influx of Latinx residents. White residents were leaving the South East L.A. county cluster of cities then known as the 'Gateway Cities', which include Huntington Park and South Gate. Soon, Latinxs residents who had lived in nearby East Los Angeles moved in and, by the 1980s, they had become the demographic majority in these South East cities (Nicolaides 2002: 6, 304).

This map's cardinal point is east, not north, signalling the cultural significance of the eastern side of Los Angeles County as the historical and geographic epicentre for the ethnic Mexican and Latinx communities in East

Los Angeles. The main South and East L.A. thoroughfares such as Florence and California Avenue, and Firestone Boulevard are clearly depicted. South Gate's main park, Salt Lake, is also shown, giving map-holders an immediately recognizable reference point for locating the backyard event. Los Angeles' ubiquitous freeways are prominently featured, with the State Route (SR) 110 freeway shown mired in perpetual and rush-hour gridlock common in Southern California evening. This seems to indicate that the event would take place after dusk. Yet the map includes the following sentence: 'No se te ocurra faltar!' ('Don't dare to skip this!') This seemingly admonishing sentence can be understood in the temporality of these gatherings that took place in the evenings and nights. Therefore, it was key for the participants to arrange their travel from their homes or worksites to this address that might have not been in a neighbourhood with which they were acquainted. Furthermore, the map presents the flows of mobility in majority Latinx and Black neighbourhoods. The freeways are represented at a particular time during the afternoon or early evening, particularly for working-class folks who have to endure the commute back to South Los Angeles from other parts of the city, such as the affluent West of Los Angeles or the industrial parts in East L.A. or the San Fernando Valley. Mobility as Genevieve Carpio argues has been an active force in the racialization of people of colour in Southern California as it ordered and constrained movement along racial lines. In the case of ethnic Mexicans permissive when involving their labour, but policed when travelling into White neighbourhoods or when riding cars for their own leisure (Carpio 2019). For Latinx immigrants who were recently arrived to Los Angeles, viewing maps featuring in documents like this flyer, it would also serve as a didactic element, instructing them on the infamous traffic congestions and the commuting rhythms of the city. In time, maps and lived experiences, along with learning from their peers or family members, guided them on how to better navigate the streets and freeways, at different times of the day. Routes that also delineate the different racial and class city boundaries.

In the second map found in the back of a January 1994 flyer, the principal coordinates for the 'tocada' or music gig in the South Central L.A. map are north and south, identifying the location of the show at the corner of Broadway and 59th Street, here portrayed as parallel to the San Pedro/L.A. Harbor Freeway, or SR 110. In this map, the promoters were signalling that show-goers were travelling deep into South Central Los Angeles. The map includes the major streets of South L.A. – Broadway, Slauson and Gage – and, of course, SR 110, which bisects South Central L.A.'s various neighbourhoods as it connects them to Downtown. The Los Angeles Downtown appears at the top of the map, the skyline whimsically depicted by the city's most iconic buildings: City Hall and, newly constructed in 1989, the Library Tower building, which for decades was the tallest building in the city and a point of reference in the landscape of the city. This map places Downtown at its farthest point top and right, indicating north both as a map coordinate and as the city's centre of gravity. While the location is South Central L.A., an area long racialized as Black or non-White, by the early 1990s South Central Los Angeles was receiving an influx of Latinx residents. Thus, this site would be perhaps familiar to some of the event attendees. The location while geographically near Downtown Los Angeles is depicted in a rather ambiguous way. The map can either place the South Central location as part of Los Angeles by being included in the same frame along the downtown skyline. Alternatively, judging by eschewed dimensions the mapmaker might have understood the



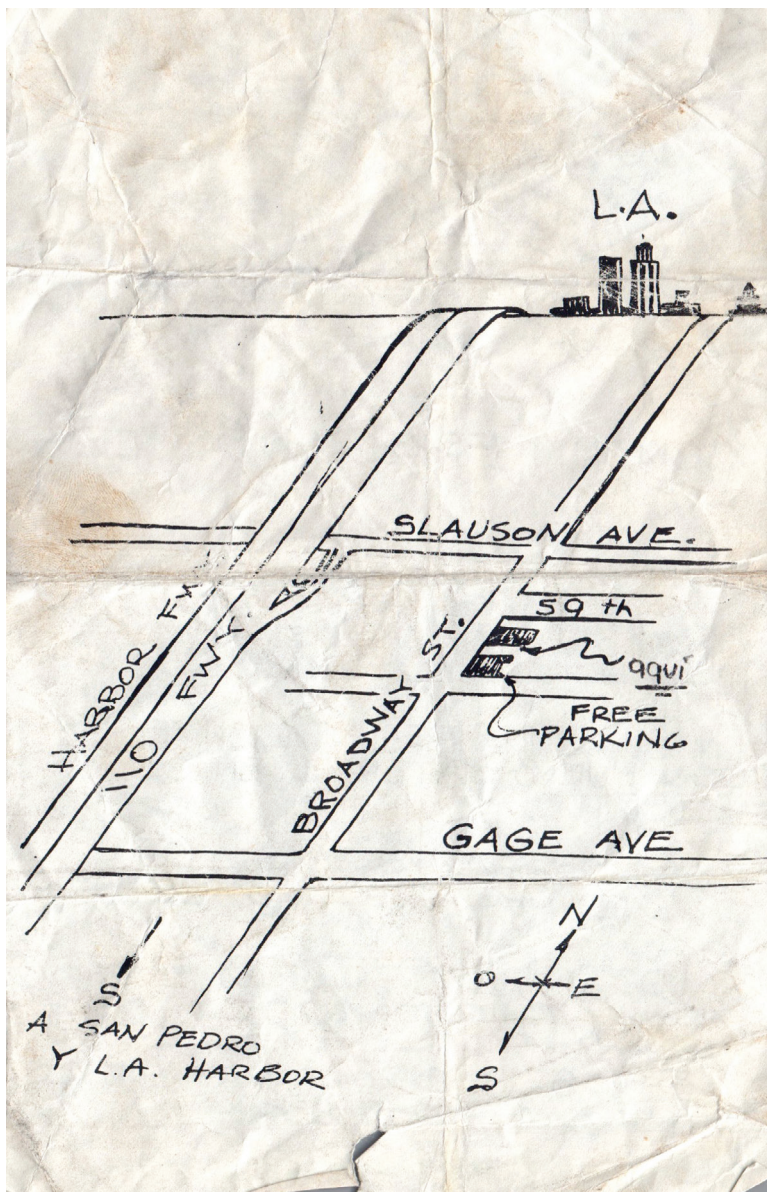


Figure 2: Map with a stylized depiction of the L.A. downtown skyline printed on the back of a promotional flyer advertising a 'Rock en Español' performance in South Los Angeles, January 1994. Author unknown. Photograph courtesy of Jorge N. Leal/The Rock Archivo LÁ.

location as being detached and afar from Downtown. Thus, including South Central as part of Los Angeles, but also showing the areas as socially and economically distant and isolated from the financial centre of the city.

The third flyer for a Rock Angelino concert contains a large image that fuses indigenous Mesoamerican iconography with the peace and love sign, a



# CLUB NOSTALGIA

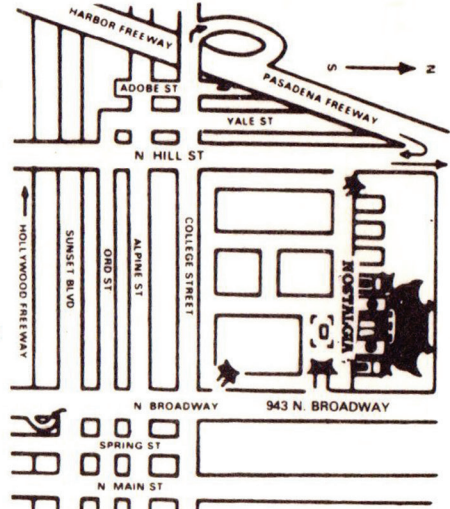
LO MEJOR DE ROCK EN ESPAÑOL

ROCK: ARGENTINO, CHILENO  
ESPAÑOL, ALTERNATIVO, y  
K-ROQ. TECHNO (only if requested)

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**TODOS LOS VIERNES  
DESCUENTO ANTES  
DE LAS 9:30 P.M.**



**HONG KONG LOW**

943 N. Broadway  
Los Angeles, Chinatown

Figure 3: Flyer for a Rock Angelino night held at the Hong Kong Low in Los Angeles' Chinatown. Undated, early 1990s. Photograph courtesy of Jorge N. Leal/The Rock Archivo LÁ.

long-recognized symbol of American rock and roll. In Los Angeles, a city long known as the 'capital of the music industry', to which rock and roll was one of its most important genres, 'Rock Angelino' musicians and fans positioned their inclusion into the mainstream Rock and Roll genre. Consequently, this image demonstrates the amalgamation of Latin American cultural references featured in 'Rock en Español', with an emblematic 'Rock and Roll' icon, to push forward the notion that 'Rock en Español' was also part of the global music genre that is Rock and Roll. Along with this composite sign, the flyer features a detailed map of Los Angeles' Chinatown, where the Hong Kong Low was located. In addition to Chinatown's street grid, the pamphlet also includes the stylized façade of the Hong Kong Low building and the iconic gates of Chinatown's plaza, as it defines the distinctly Asian-American area to the prospective attendees. As a venue, the Hong Kong Low has a storied trajectory in previous Southern California music cultures. In the 1970s and 1980s, the site, then known as the Hong Kong Café, became the epicentre of Los Angeles punk rock (Lewis 1988). Punk rock was initially perceived as an outsider genre within mainstream rock and roll. By the early 1990s the Hong Kong Low served as an improvised venue for several Rock en Español shows. These events embodied some of the same outsider status as early punk rock, as it was sung in Spanish, created and followed by Latinx youth

and performed in a venue located in a decisively Chinese American neighbourhood, which is often considered as a foreign space within the American metropolis. As Natalia Molina asserts, Chinese Americans much like Latinxs have been racialized and defined as perpetual outsiders to American society, even when both groups have had a long presence in California (Molina 2006).

Los Angeles' Chinatown is located north of Downtown Los Angeles and close to the Los Angeles Plaza, the founding site of the city and a site that is popular with Catholic Latinxs families as the Church of Our Lady Queen of the Angels, or La Placita is located within. This church is one of the most popular and attended Catholic churches in the region. Moreover, several bus lines of the public transportation bus network known as the Southern California Rapid Transit District or RTD in the 1990s (subsequently rebranded at MTA) connecting primarily Latinx neighbourhoods with Downtown traversed through Chinatown. While Latinx Angelenos were probably familiar with the surroundings of the Los Angeles Chinatown, for many of them, particularly for the young Latin American immigrants who attended these events, these were likely the first instances of exploring these distinctly ethnic enclaves for their leisure, beyond their work-related travels into Downtown L.A. Thus, this flyer suggests familiarity and adaptation to the multicultural and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of Southern California.

The fourth flyer features a map with several noteworthy details. In contrast to the other maps examined, which promoted events that took place in the evening or at night, this flyer is for a daylight civic event. The flyer is an invitation to a 'Cinco de Mayo' celebration that took place in May 1993. The 'Cinco de Mayo' nominally commemorates the 1862 defeat of the occupying French army by a much-depleted Mexican army during France's invasion of Mexico. Yet, the holiday has long been a commemoration of Mexican culture in the American Southwest (Hayes-Bautista 2012).

In addition to the location of the event, it also presents a detailed parade route throughout Gardena, located within Los Angeles County. The map, which sketches the procession route, signals the city park as the end location of the parade. As the flyer indicates, the park was to the site of a *Rock en Español* concert including bands such as María Fatal, Juana La Loca, and Los Olvidados – whose lyrics will be discussed later in this article – that took place after the parade in Gardena, a city which, in the 1990s, had a small, but growing Latinx community. This flyer denotes the merging of two Latinxs distinct cultural expressions at a point of demographic change. According to David Hayes-Bautista, the 'Cinco de Mayo' commemoration has been observed by ethnic Mexican in California since the nineteenth century as a celebration of freedom, racial equality, and democracy in Mexico. Ideals that these ethnic Mexicans – particularly the land-owning elite known as Californios – sought, would be extended to them by the US government after taking control of California and other territories in the aftermath of the Mexican-American war (1846–48). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed between Mexico and the US defined the rights of the Mexican citizens in newly acquired lands. While it nominally extended American citizenship to people living in these territories, but who were seldom treated as equal as Whites (Hayes-Bautista 2012: 2–5). The inclusion of bands performing 'Rock Angelino' a more contemporary and Latin American musical genre, which attracted a younger audience to this long-standing celebration of Mexican culture is indicative of the larger presence of more recent Latin American immigrants and the efforts to incorporate them into celebrations organized by US-born Latinxs. The differences among

CELEBRACION **GRATIS**

# DE CINCO DE MAYO

COMIDA Y ENTRETENIMIENTO  
TODO EL DIA

SABADO 1, 1993  
3:00pm-5:00pm **GRATIS**

**ROCK EN  
E ESPAÑOL**

CON:

**MARIA FATAL**  
**JUANA LA LOCA**  
**LOS OLVIDADOS**

GARDENA RECREATION PARK  
CALLES: NORMANDIE Y 158th

PROMOVIDO POR  
**NOSTALGIA**

Figure 4: Flyer with a detailed *Cinco de Mayo* parade route in the city of Gardena in May 1993. The map signals a park as the end location of the parade. Author Unknown. Photograph courtesy of Jorge N. Leal/The Rock Archivo LÁ.

Latinxs based on their immigrant and citizenship statuses have long been a source of conflict due the presumption that immigrants would depress wages and take employment opportunities from US Latinxs (Gutiérrez 1995).

These four maps from the 1990s represent different locations in Southern California. In an initial viewing these maps can be seen as being merely created to orient the viewers to these locations, or as solely visual representations of localities to a certain audience, the likely concert-goers who were also Latinxs. A more in-depth look, however, shows that these maps hold a detailed and comprehensive spatial and temporal cartographical representation of this particular historical period in Southern California. Earlier studies of predominantly Mexican-American communities by Ricardo Romo and George

Sánchez have skilfully mapped out the everyday ethnic Mexican presence in East Los Angeles and in neighbourhoods such as Boyle Heights during the first part of the twentieth century (Romo 1983; Sánchez 1995). In addition, to study the geopolitical dynamics that led to the 1943 Zoot Suit riots, Eduardo Obregón Pagán has analysed the predominantly Mexican neighbourhoods in Downtown and Chávez Ravine (the site now occupied by Dodger Stadium) during Second World War to show how Mexican-American youth were defiantly present in the public space of Downtown Los Angeles (Pagán 2000).

In contrast, the maps contained in the flyers analysed here trace and chart out the geographical expansive and demographic ascendancy of the Latinx presence in the region's urban space in the last third of the twentieth century. During this era, Latinxs became the majority or a sizable population in many areas beyond the traditional Eastside neighbourhoods. Just a couple of decades prior, these areas in South and South East Los Angeles were perceived as solidly 'lily-white' suburbs or defined as Black districts, areas that scholars have yet to begun to fully examine to account for the profound changes during this near-present era.

These maps also present some continuities. For example, they present how Latinxs immigrants along with novel music genres emanating from Latin America were incorporated as participants of traditional culturally specific civic celebrations in the public space of Southern California such as 'Cinco de Mayo', which has long been celebrated by ethnic Mexicans. In addition, these maps reflect on the vast freeway system's omnipresence in the region and how this interconnected web of highways defines their neighbourhoods and shapes their mobility in the urban space. Furthermore, these maps provide geographical markings of Latinxs interactions with other racialized communities while negotiating their understanding and presence in the multi-ethnic, multicultural Los Angeles milieu at a different historical moment, where Whites are no longer a majority.

### **THE LYRICAL CARTOGRAPHY OF IMMIGRANT LATINX LOS ANGELES**

During this same period of the 1990s in which these flyers were created, bands like Los Olvidados ('The Forgotten Ones') performed in the ad hoc venues that these maps located within the metropolis. The songs penned by Mexican immigrant Jorge Infante and performed by his band Los Olvidados also charted out the geographies of immigrant labour and leisure in Los Angeles, while drawing from immigrant rhythms and sounds of the Global South. Los Olvidados mixed conventional rock and roll influences along with traditional Mexican music and beats and melodies he learned from world music CDs, such as Algerian Raï, Soukous from the Congo or Calypso from the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Lyrically, Infante captured the quotidian existence of young immigrants akin to the Los Olvidados members. He sought to describe the seemingly never-ending weekdays employed in labour-intensive temporary jobs, which did not yield stable employment. Conditioned to be perpetually on the hunt for a 'jale', or work gig precluded them from exploring the glamorous Los Angeles landscapes often portrayed in Hollywood productions, which the band members grew up watching in American movies and TV shows during their childhood in Mexico and that they thought they would experience once they arrived to Los Angeles.

For instance, the Congolese soukous-infused 'Viernes' ('Friday') begins with an account of the workweek spent performing gruelling physical work:

'La semana me he pasado, trabajando como esclavo' ('I have spent all week working like a slave') (Infante 1996). The day that signals the end of the workweek is also the beginning of yet another self-indulging wild weekend in Los Angeles. The song sung by Los Olvidados singer Rubén 'Tucupa' Delgado narrates how a Friday for an immigrant young man starts, 'con un cruising por la Whittier. Ya de perdis por la Soto' ('with a cruising on Whittier [boulevard] or at least on Soto'). Both thoroughfares are in the predominantly Mexican-American neighbourhoods of East Los Angeles. These boulevards have long been sites of car 'cruising', where ethnic Mexican youth drove along during weekends, which have constantly been subject to heavy regulation or crackdowns by police agencies. Cruising, paraphrasing Chicano writer Alex Espinoza, is not about where you are going, but rather cruising for ethnic Mexican youth is the journey itself to understand the lay of the land and be seen as part of the social landscape of the city (Espinoza 2019: 17–18).

As the song continues, the narrator travels to the west of the city of Los Angeles, demarcated as a more multiracial space. In this passage, Sunset boulevard is implied as a site for engaging in late-night same-sex furtive desires; 'Ya de perdis en la Sunset me peso un joto' ('at least on Sunset [Boulevard] I'll catch a "joto"' [queer man, in this case working as a sex worker]). This gay cruising reference could be read as a self-deprecating joke on the migrant's financial insolvent status and his ensuing inability to go on a date with a woman, thus forcing him to resort to finding a willing queer man to fulfil its sexual desires. Furthermore, the lyrics also suggest how young migrants – who were part of Los Olvidados' social world – entered new non-gender normative social milieu in Los Angeles. For Infante's fellow immigrants who openly engaged in fleeting same-sex liaisons, their relative anonymity in Southern California was one of the appealing factors for pursuing these dalliances. As Lionel Cantú (Cantú 2009) and more recently Héctor Carrillo have shown, migration can also represent a re-shaping of sexual identities for migrants (Carrillo 2018). Thus, the Friday night cruising adventures described by Los Olvidados in their song present the exhilaration of leisure to escape the rigors of the exploitative and insecure daily labour condition. The songs also chart out the possibilities of venturing in known Los Angeles streets. This in addition to being assertive and autonomous, yet also furtive about their queer sexual practices in the Southern California urban space.

A decade later, in 2007, Raskahuele's band, composed of US-raised young Latinos, crafted one of their most popular songs entitled 'Alvarado Street'. This tune discusses the perilous existence of immigrants who feel a sense of belonging in Los Angeles, yet do not have the legal status to fully belong to US society (Raskahuele 2007). This song combines a distinct version of fast and syncopated Latin ska with reggae rhythms and lyrics sung solely in Spanish. The band starts the recording with street sounds that capture Spanish speakers, probably black-market vendors, chanting: 'residencia, seguro social' (residence card, social security). These are US government documents that serve as proof of regularized legal status for immigrants. The lack of these documents renders a person unauthorized to work or live in the United States. Yet, counterfeit versions of these documents are wilfully accepted by employers seeking cheap labour while ignoring the provenance of these credentials. These documents that farcically allow immigrants to 'legalize' themselves are often sold in the black market around the Westlake, Pico-Union area, a cluster of predominantly Latinx neighbourhoods to the west of Downtown Los Angeles. The Westlake, Pico-Union corridor is traversed by Alvarado street, which is where the intro sounds were likely recorded.

The song then proceeds with the following lyrics, ‘Sigo pensando las maneras de ser residente aquí’ (‘I am still thinking of the ways to become a resident here’). This is followed with the fraught feeling of belonging brought by acquiring counterfeit documents. ‘Caminando por la calle de la Alvarado siento que soy de aquí. Con la mica chueca en la mano todo puedo conseguir’ (‘Walking by Alvarado street, I feel I am from here. With the fake green card in my hand. I can obtain everything’). These lyrics make visible the ubiquity of Latinx immigrant presence in the urban space of Los Angeles. Yet, this presence and incorporation is hampered and threatened by the restrictive immigration laws and policies that make legal immigration an onerous process. These counterfeit documents also create a fabricated illusion of belonging and access to ‘obtain everything’ in an allusion to the so-called American dream. Nevertheless, there is a fraudulent fantasy, as it is likely that these counterfeit documents can only be utilized to secure employment in low-paying exploitative jobs, without much labour protections. Most damagingly, the mere possession of these documents can be considered a crime that can lead to the holder’s deportation.

The experiences of many Latinx immigrants inform this song. In particular from those without legal status who have lived in fear of being scapegoated while travelling or just being out in the city’s public space due to anti-immigrant policies and policy-makers’ inaction to pass laws that would grant them legalization. For instance, the California State Proposition 187, an anti-immigrant initiative, was placed on the ballot and approved by the California electorate in November 1994. The proposition sought to deny most public services to unauthorized immigrants. While most of the propositions were deemed unconstitutional by the courts, the approval led to a highly charged anti-immigrant sociopolitical environment in California that weighted heavily on immigrants without legal status. They feared that any interaction with police agents would escalate to their subsequent deportation. Moreover, by the time this song was released, the US Congress had failed to approve numerous legislative proposals – such as the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 – that would have granted legalization and a path to citizenship to immigrants living without authorized status in the United States.

The Raskahuele lyrics provide a tongue-in-cheek solution to the anguishing dilemma faced by many Latinxs immigrants who lack authorized immigrant status. The song declares ‘necesito mi residencia para cambiar mi historia aquí’ in the next and final stanza (‘I need my residence [status] to change my history here’). While the solution being offered is deceitful, the sidewalks and environment along Alvarado street are charted out as the geography of possibility, presented as a place to solve their unauthorized status, even when it is rather pyrrhic and unlawful. Yet, the mere act of walking along as an immigrant describes Alvarado street as a place for dreaming, for aspiring to be part of the city, and also seeking to ‘change their history’ in Los Angeles in ways that are beyond the narrator’s means due to the US Congress decades-long inaction on approving any time of legislation to provide legal status to the approximate ten million and half of unauthorized immigrants (Budiman 2020).

These songs by Los Olvidados and Raskahuele describe recognized and illustrious Los Angeles thoroughfares that have been the inspiration for landmark artistic productions and have given a sonic and visual representation of Los Angeles. The essence of Whittier boulevard as a Mexican-American space was first sonically narrated in the 1965 ‘Whittier Blvd’, track by Chicano rock and roll pioneers, ‘Thee Midnites’. The prolonged and multifaceted Sunset

Boulevard has long been the inspiration of songs, and films that attempt to capture its glamorous and gritty side. Case in point is the 1950s iconic film noir *Sunset Boulevard*, which was adapted as a musical in 1991 and depicts the delusions that arise from chasing fame in Hollywood. Other examples include the multiple mentions of the boulevard in the songs of disco diva Donna Summers such as 'Sunset People' (1980) and the late Tupac Shakur's hymn to the city, 'To Live and Die in L.A.' (1996). For its part, Alvarado street has been part of Southern California's popular culture, at times portrayed as part of a bygone placid era such as in the song 'MacArthur Park' written by prolific composer Jimmy Webb in 1968. The song would be also covered by Donna Summer in 1978 and became a disco hit. This tune describes a calm park scene before a relationship break-up. MacArthur Park is located along Alvarado Street and adjacent to the counterfeit black-market environs in which the Raskahuele song takes place.

The two songs map out recognized Los Angeles areas and streets based on lived immigrant experiences that are not part of the mainstream visions of the metropolis. In Los Olvidados' piece, the boulevards of the city are more than just thoroughfares for travel. The streets are destinations, places to search and find leisure and sexual escapism during the weekend nights. The streets are places where immigrants can go beyond being overworked labourers. In the streets the agency of immigrants can be extended to choose how to spend their time and act on their sexual preferences, even if only during Friday nights. In the case of Raskahuele's lyrics, the boulevard in its diurnal temporality is charted out as a place of possibilities for belonging conditioned upon obtaining legal status. As this is a possibility that is foreclosed, then the black market of counterfeit documents along Alvarado street offers the possibility to trick or manoeuvre around the system. While the narrator in the song knows well that these documents are forgeries, they allow for changing his own history in Los Angeles.

These songs provide another interpretation of how Latinxs have encounter and engage with transportation networks as powerful forces within Latinx communities. In Avila's study, he accounts for how the Southern California freeway network's construction destroyed and bisected eastside ethnic Mexican communities during the second part of the twentieth century. He also accounts for how Chicano painters such as Carlos Almaraz, David Botello, and Frank Romero have memorialized the lost communities, while also remade the freeways' meanings in Latinx communities in their works (Avila 2014). For these Latinx immigrants who made Los Angeles home in the late twentieth century and first decades of the twentieth-first centuries, they are no longer memorializing the demolished built environment. Instead, they are sketching out their own version of Los Angeles that might otherwise escape formal chronicling due to its legal and moral ambiguity. From their vantage point at street level, the writers of these songs capture their fears and their aspirations as immigrants living undocumented, yet seeking to find any solution, even considering buying counterfeit documents in the streets as depicted in Raskahuele's song. Moreover, Avila suggests that freeways, and other transportation modes, also allowed non-White youth for a more widespread access to leisure sites that were away from their communities (Avila 2004: 110–13). This is also key for Latinx gender nonconforming folks, who used the freeways to drive away from their restrictive environments and were able to find queer bars and other sites to be part of a welcoming queer community. In the case



of the Los Olvidados song, the boulevard was the destination itself for seeking sexual pleasure with other men.

Taken together as immigrant chronicles of late twentieth century and early aughts, these songs by Los Olvidados and Raskahuele offer detailed lyrical cartographies about sites that are pivotal to the immigrant Latinx experience of this time period, which expanded beyond the confines of the traditional ethnic Mexican neighbourhoods of East Los Angeles. Considering earlier music scenes that involved ethnic Mexican youth offers some parallels. Anthony Macias has studied how L.A. ethnic Mexican youth in the middle of the twentieth century were able to create self-affirming identities through their participation in music and youth scenes that were both Mexican and American (Macias 2008). In contrast to the L.A. Latinx youth of earlier generations, the identities characters portrayed in these songs are firmly grounded in their immigrant experience, as they cannot feel 'American' due to their unauthorized migratory status. Nonetheless, their sonic chronicles depict a sense of defiant Angeleno identity as Latinx immigrants who claim belonging to Los Angeles, notwithstanding their unresolved legal condition.

While Los Olvidados mention East Los Angeles' Whittier boulevard as the starting point of their Friday night ludic adventure, the journey soon moves into a queer exploration on the famed Sunset boulevard, thus making the male immigrant an active participant of the Los Angeles night geography, expanding his presence in the city beyond his mobility as a labourer. Instead, the narrator in the song is portrayed as an immigrant who has the agency to find and engage in ludic sexual leisure in the more mainstream setting of Sunset Boulevard. For their part, the lyrics by 'Raskahuele' written in the first decade of the twentieth-first century, assert the Latinx immigrant presence in the urban space while envisioning expansive material possibilities of the Latinx immigrants in Southern California, but only by obtaining counterfeit documents. Thus, their existence and aspirations in the city are perpetually accompanied with the anguish and hope of resolving their legal status, a condition shared by thousands of Latinx immigrants in the United States.

### **RETRACING THE PERSONAL AND THE METROPOLITAN MEMORY VIA GOOGLE MAPS**

The maps included in flyers announcing Rock Angelino shows and the songs examined in the previous sections share how 'recién venidos' ('newcomers') mapped out urban space and their formative experiences in Southern California during the 1990s and the 2000s. In an era before broad internet use, these spatial renderings and every day chronicles were primarily shared among 'ephemeral forum' attendees and devotees of these bands, most of them immigrant Latinxs.

For the children of immigrants and Latinxs youth coming of age in twentieth-first century Los Angeles, the availability of internet mapping tools has presented them with novel resources to creatively bridge the gap between place, memory, personal and community history. For instance, in the multimedia piece entitled 'Utilizing Google maps to triangulate the course of my desmadre over the years', South Los Angeles poet Viva Padilla (the nom de plume of Anna Ureña) employs the widely accessible mapping software to spatially trace and reflect on her experiences and travails during her 1990s-2000s childhood and younger years. In her work Padilla – who has long been a part of contemporary L.A. Latinx music scenes as a 'scenester' and

music DJ – virtually locates places in the Los Angeles region that are significant in her life and reflect on how her coming of age experiences intersect with the history and the lived experiences of Black and Brown Angelenos (Padilla 2020).

By travelling along with the cursor within the mapping software, Padilla traces the beginning of her life at ‘some hospital run by nuns in East Los [Angeles]’. She then proceeds to describe her upbringing by visiting the house she grew up in South Central: ‘A house built in 1910 with an 80-year-old avocado tree’. In this initial passage, Padilla weaves her and her family’s spatial presence in the racialized communities of East Los Angeles and South Central. The hospital that she references, Santa Marta was in the heart of East Los Angeles. Since its opening in 1924, the Catholic administered hospital served Latinx families in Los Angeles, who preferred to be seen by the majority Latinx doctors and nurses who staffed the hospital. The hospital closed off operations after being acquired by a for-profit health company that went bankrupt in 2004 (Hyman and Labossiere 2004). This was the predatory capitalistic ending for the hospital and its history, which began with priests and volunteers eager to serve the working-class Latinx communities in Los Angeles. These types of community healthcare approaches have a long history in L.A. Latinx communities. Yet, as Padilla recounts in her text, these are now hazy memories, be it the name of the actual building of the hospital where she was born.

Padilla also intertwines her family history with the history of ubiquitous but upending natural events that are intrinsically part of California: earthquakes. ‘The house never changed its bones after the Northridge earthquake, but it’s bracing itself for the Big One’. Here Padilla alludes to the amplified destruction that earthquakes have brought and threaten to bring in augmented forms to South L.A. due to the chronic disinvesting in these communities, comprised of people of colour. During the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, thousands of South Central residents were forced to vacate their apartments and homes as these were heavily damaged by the earthquake without receiving much government assistance (Bolin and Stanford 2006: 74–144). Padilla follows the description of her South Central home with a phrase that discusses the murder of an 8-year-old boy outside a bar down the street from her South Central home and how this traumatic experience haunts her: ‘since then I imagine angry bullets are a spatial anomaly in the spacetime continuum, there is no ever there actually holding a gun’. Here, Padilla refers to ever-present spectre of violence in her South Central surrounding created and exacerbated by systemic racism and antagonistic over-policing, which, in 2020, is reported to account for police agents shooting an average of three to four people within L.A. county per month (Levin 2020).

Padilla then charts out the different places of the ‘desmadres’, or wild party experiences that she took part during her young adult life. The locations listed by Padilla have layered histories for Brown and Black Angelenos. For instance, Lynwood was known as a ‘lily-white’ city that fiercely kept Blacks from moving into its borders from Compton’s neighbouring city. However, by the 1980s, most of its White residents had moved out, along with the companies that employed them, with Latinxs replacing them as the demographic city majority (Leal 2012). Nonetheless, this demographic transformation also represented a drop in its Latinx residents’ incoming and living standards, who often resorted to having several families living in the same home to divide the housing costs. Padilla’s wild nights in Los Angeles take place in this type of dwellings.

She discusses her experiences smoking marijuana in a converted garage in Lynwood, an informal housing practice that many Latinx and Black residents resort to as means to create extra and affordable housing dwellings (Wegmann 2015). This is a region where affordable housing is scarce due to real estate speculation that drives up housing prices to almost unattainable levels for working-class Angelenos. From 2000 to 2015 the average home price rose up to a stark 126 per cent, more than any other US city (Glick Kudler 2015). The scarcity of affordable housing spurs the ingenuity of Latinxs residents who resort to ad hoc living quarters. While these unpermitted dwellings are absent from the municipal housing maps, this type of informal housing is very much part of the social and residential cartography in Latinxs communities.

Next Padilla discusses her Lynwood nights smoking pot, which she follows with the following anecdote, 'shaved my head soon thereafter, the city blamed it on the coming and going of freight trucks, stolen panties under the seats of truck drivers, and Little Cesar's being the worst pizza because you can't eat it the next day'. The previous sentences insinuate fraught interactions with law enforcement or government agents. Yet, these also connect to the instances of environmental injustices present in South Los Angeles where pollution and contamination are higher than in other parts of the region. Residents must contend with the heavy traffic of trucks and freight that transport merchandise between the port of Los Angeles to distribution centres throughout Southern California. Padilla also discusses the ubiquitous donut shops present throughout the Southern California working-class neighbourhoods and which, by operating twenty-four a day, have become the refuge for nocturnal workers, old men, and drug addicts with whom she got involved during her 'desmadre' days.

In her work, Padilla also yearns to make her presence in Southern California more permanent and established. Padilla mentions that she lives in a studio apartment at the time of writing the piece. Yet she dreams, 'of a house, lawn chairs and hammocks, to make it real'. Padilla is likely referring to a real, concrete state of acquiring a secure living condition in a home, the now more than ever-elusive aspiration in urban Los Angeles. Padilla as many other working-class Angelenos of colour are faced with housing precarity due to the lack of access to affordable housing in the region, where the medium yearly household income is \$80,000 (US Census 2019). According to the California Association of Realtors, a prospective buyer needs to earn at least \$127,000 to be able to own a home (California Association of Realtors 2020). Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the average price from a home for sale rose to 12.2 per cent (Khouri 2020).

In her piece, which is both written and read on audio, Padilla first utilizes Google Maps to trace her youthful nocturnal and debauchery experiences, before reflecting on these locations' meaning from the vantage point of the present. Yet, Padilla does more than that. The spatial presence and past movements of Padilla's life might be fragmentary or even imperceptible in the maps shown by Google or in the macro histories about Los Angeles. Nonetheless, by identifying these locations with Google Maps, Padilla inserts her personal and familiar history into the layered historical and contemporary fabric of Southern California, thus capturing the personal and collective experiences that cannot be perceived or located in the seemingly all too-inclusive maps offered by Google. Furthermore, Padilla's piece acutely denounces the lack of affordable and spacious housing, thus pointing out the larger economic conditions that have led to dramatic demographic shifts

out of central Los Angeles by residents of colour to the exurbs of the Inland Empire comprised of the San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. As Juan de Lara estimates, about 1.7 million Latinx moved to the Inland Empire in the last three decades. Many of them left central Los Angeles in search of more affordable housing, particularly after the ‘great recession’ of 2008 (De Lara 2018: 147). Conversely, South Los Angeles neighbourhoods formerly derided as slums or in the racialized term of ‘ghetto’ during the White flight era, are now ripe for the influx of speculative real estate investment that would turn old homes into desirable dwellings for more affluent and overwhelmingly White residents.

## CONCLUSION

In tandem the flyer maps, the songs, and the poem examined here are part of the shared historical spatial memory lived, created, heard and memorialized by Latinx at the street level during the last three decades. These sources allow us to chart out some key moments of the Greater Los Angeles metropolis. These maps in visual, sonic or textual form portray the past and near-present social fabric every day in ways that would otherwise be hard to document. While ephemeral due to the medium used to share them be it fragile paper, songs in limited album releases, or as multimedia recordings, these mappings are part of the immigrant, Latinx, Black Los Angeles collective historical archive.

Between 1990 and 2020, Los Angeles experienced an enormous influx of immigrants from Latin American, which, coupled with the growth of US-born Latinx population, made Latinxs the largest ethnic group in Southern California. The maps printed in the flyers for music shows in the early part of the 1990s provide an insightful representation of the diverse areas throughout Los Angeles County – beyond the traditional Eastside – that Latinxs began to call home and how they represented their presence within multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. The song lyrics narrate everyday and exceptional Latinx immigrant experiences. These lyrics also share insights on how Latinxs used the streets and freeways to expand their agency, to go beyond mere labourers, as they engage in defiant leisure activities or how they aspire to become a fully fledged Angeleno by attempting to gain forged legal status. The recent multimedia poem features the possibility of using digital tools to connect personal memories and spatial geographies across time and space, allowing us to connect them to larger systemic problems that Latinxs and other communities confront in the past and present.

Most significantly, examining these cartographical renderings of the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries make explicit assertions. These mappings from below reveal Los Angeles as an urban palimpsest, in which the profound and interconnected Latinxs historical presence in the region is unveiled, affirmed and connected to the present and future of Los Angeles.

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