

City acts as youth skirmish

Internet-driven assaults demonstrate intolerance

BY JONATHAN CLARK
The News

Ever since he first discovered “emo” music five years ago, 17-year-old Emmanuel Huerta has been making regular two-hour trips from his home in the sprawling suburbs outside Mexico City to the capital’s Glorieta Insurgentes, a concrete plaza and transportation hub on the southern fringe of the free-thinking Zona Rosa neighborhood.

There, he hangs out with other teens who dress in black, peg their jeans tightly to their legs, comb their bangs down over their eyes and listen to emo-core, an offshoot of punk rock that emphasizes powerful emotions like love, rejection and depression rather than punk’s traditional expressions of political and social discontent.

“We share our feelings, talk about bands we like, and just hang out together and have fun, like any other kids,” Huerta said of his days at the plaza.

But lately, life at Glorieta Insurgentes hasn’t been so much fun for the “emos,” as Huerta and his friends are called.

Other teens have been posting messages to Internet blogs that ridicule the emos for their sentimentality, many accusing them of being gay.

Videos filled with homophobic language and violent imagery have popped up on YouTube with Spanish titles that translate as “How to kill an emo” and “We declare war on you, emos.”

Then, on March 8, in an apparent response to a call to arms circulated on the Internet, an estimated 200 teens descended on a square in the central city of Querétaro and pummeled a group of emos with pipes and sticks.

A week later in Mexico City, following reports of a similar Internet-driven attack plan, emos

at the Glorieta Insurgentes tussled with youths whom the local media described as punks and soccer fans.

Elsewhere, emo kids in the city of Aguascalientes reported receiving e-mails from “metaleros,” or metalheads, warning them that they would be beaten if they showed up at the state fair in April. Other warnings and incidents were reported from Puebla and Guerrero in the south to Coahuila and Tamaulipas in the north.

DIVERSITY HARD TO ACCEPT
The attacks and threats against the emos have commanded considerable attention in Mexico, especially in the socially progressive capital, where a leftist city government regularly makes headlines by extending rights and protections to homosexuals, transgender people and sex workers.

The anti-emo violence, pundits and social critics say, demonstrates just how far Mexican society has to go in terms of accepting diversity.

●●
Everyone has the right to freely associate, to express themselves and to dress the way they want.●●

HILDA TÉLLEZ
Mexico City Human Rights Commission official

“This is still a very intolerant society in many ways,” said Ana María Salazar, a Mexico City-based newspaper columnist and radio commentator. “But I think what is most interesting and troubling is that now we’re seeing this type of intolerance in young people.”

Many of the threats and violence against the emos have



Four self-proclaimed emos hang out at the Insurgentes Metro station plaza where an Internet-driven assault took place last weekend.



Attacks on emo kids demonstrate rising intolerance in Mexican society.

come from members of other teen subcultures that also adopt black clothing and emotional-charged music, including the “punketos” (punks), “skatos” (skaters) and “darks” (goths).

“They say we’re copying their fashion, or they say they don’t like the way we’re so

focused on heavy emotions, like depression,” said Óscar Medina, a 16-year-old emo and a regular at the Glorieta Insurgentes. “But they’re just jealous because we can express our feelings and they can’t.”

Following the March 15 confrontation in Mexico City,

a group of emos protested outside the capital Attorney General’s Office demanding that police respect and protect their rights. Their call was soon echoed by the United Nations’ high commissioner for human rights in Mexico, Américo Incalcaterra, and by the Mexico City Human Rights Commission, or CDHDF.

“Everyone has the right to freely associate, to express themselves and to dress the way they want,” said Hilda Téllez, the director of public attention and orientation with the autonomous CDHDF. “And we think that these acts and expressions against the emos directly contradict those rights.”

CITY GOVERNMENT STEPS IN
On Wednesday, acting under orders from Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico City Police Chief Joel Ortega announced he was instructing his officers to be more sensitive to the emos, and he called on the city’s punks and goths to be more accepting as well.

“We are making a call for tolerance with this group of emos, even if they are a minority, because there are other kids who, because of their ideals, are also in the process of forming splinter groups,” he told reporters.

The day after Ortega’s announcement, rumors began to circulate of an attack on the emos planned for Good Friday at the Glorieta Insurgentes.

According to media reports, someone had been posting solicitations to come “crucify” the emos that day at 3 p.m., the same time Jesus died on the cross at Calvary.

Ortega responded by dispatching hundreds of police to the plaza to stand guard over the few dozen kids, including Emmanuel Huerta, who decided to brave the threat.

A handful of punks showed up at one point to glare menacingly from the walkways leading into the plaza, but the 3 p.m. deadline came and went without incident. The police and a swarm of TV camera crews had likely scared off the troublemakers, Huerta said.

Even so, he said, he felt more sadness than relief. He would prefer not to have to rely on police protection to come to the plaza.

“We just want people to respect our right to be ourselves and to leave us alone,” he said.

That afternoon, a top city official arrived at the Glorieta Insurgentes and announced that the mayor’s office would host a roundtable meeting on Tuesday in hopes of brokering a truce between the emos and other teen subcultures.

“We can’t allow this type of phenomenon to take hold in our city,” said Alejandro Martín Juárez, director of political records for the city’s Government Secretariat. “Let’s say ‘no’ to intolerance and violence.”