During the 1990s, the Spanish American novel was receiving universal acclaim, a situation partly fueled by the competition among Spanish publishing houses, numerous translations into other languages, and a fast-paced book distribution system, prompted by new communication technologies. Boom writers, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa, remained active until they were in their eighties, producing their literary works for over five decades and extending their literary careers—which included Nobel prizes for García Márquez and Vargas Llosa—until the twenty-first century. In addition, authors who started writing in the 1970s such as Isabel Allende, Ángeles Mastretta, and Antonio Skármeta were becoming popular with the reading public, and young writers born in the 1970s in Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina, for example, found it easy to reach an international market previously reserved for con-secrated authors. For literary critics, however, there were still many unresolved issues regarding the contemporary Latin American literary field. One of the main problems was the question of which name to use to describe this new literary period. While today one can study the Boom from the point of view of their shared aesthetics and narrative styles, since the 1970s critics have employed a series of neologisms—Post-Boom, boomerang, babyboom, postmodernism—in their attempt to define the characteristics of Latin American literature at the turn of the century. Within this critical context, plagued with terminology problems, the “Crack” group made its appearance. A group of Mexican writers born between 1961 and 1968, which included Ricardo Chávez Castañeda, Alejandro Estivill, Vicente
Herrasti, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Ángel Palou, Eloy Urroz, and Jorge Volpi, came together with the publication of a manifesto in 1996.

In a country like Mexico, where there is a tradition of literary groups making significant contributions to the nation’s twentieth-century literary history—as is the case of “Ateneo de la Juventud” (Atheneum of Youth), the “Contemporáneos” group, and the writers from the “Generación de Medio Siglo” (Mid-Century Generation)—the Crack movement has been regarded with suspicion, usually accused of having exceptional marketing skills. Critical, academic, and journalistic debates have not stopped the term from solidifying its presence as a point of reference in the study of recent Latin American narrative. Established Mexican writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Sergio Pitol, and Elena Poniatowska have rejoiced in the emergence of this group on the national literary scene. There are university courses in Chile, Spain, and the United States devoted to studying the phenomenon. Their manifesto has been translated into English, French, and German and reviews of these writers’ works that are enthusiastically positive as well as openly negative have been published in world-renowned newspapers such as The New York Times, Le Monde, and El País. In the meantime, the careers of the seven members of the group have grown and they have published over seventy novels and thirty texts in other genres, including short stories, poetry, different kind of essays—literary, historical, biographical, and political. The corpus of texts is so enormous that it is no longer possible to classify them as a unified aesthetic project. Among the aspects the seven writers share are age group, nationality, and a concept of literary friendship connected to the idea of critical thought. It is even unclear how many writers belong to the group: Padilla, Urroz, and Volpi have been present from the beginning and have participated in all the group’s projects. Chávez Castañeda, Herrasti, and Palou did not initially take part in the group experience and Estivill, who signed one of the first group texts, Variaciones sobre un tema de Faulkner (Variations on One of Faulkner’s Topics) in 1989, stopped writing until 2002. There are still many unanswered questions about the movement: What is “the Crack”? Is it a group or a style? Is there any value to their attempt at renewing Latin American literature in the 1990s? What is the group’s connection to the subcontinent’s literary tradition?

With the intention of studying the Crack in the context of the Latin American literary narrative at the beginning of the twenty-first century my chapter aims to present an account of the first encounters among the members from the late 1980s until the creation of their key term two decades later;