El/La Mataviejitas: Killing genders in Mexico City

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the degree of M.A. in Communication Studies.

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August 2008

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Abstract

Beginning in 1998, homicides against older women in Mexico City began to register in increasing numbers. However, it was not until 2003 that police began to trace patterns in these homicides and by 2005 suggested the possibility that a serial killer, who came to be nicknamed “El Mataviejitas” (“the little old lady killer,” with the article “el” indicating a male subject) was responsible for the murder of more than 40 elderly women. The modus operandi, according to police, was that El Mataviejitas dressed as a nurse from the official program Si Vale and asphyxiated elderly women with a stethoscope, tights or cable. On January 25, 2006, Mexico City police captured a female wrestler, Juana Barraza Samperio, as she fled the scene where an 89-year-old woman had been strangled with a stethoscope. The next day’s news read: “Mataviejitas falls after committing another crime: it’s a woman.” My thesis analyzes the shift in gendered and sexed constructions in Mexican periodicals when police believed the serial killer was a man, then a transvestite. It will analyze the representations of Juana Barraza, as La Dama del Silencio (her wrestling persona) and as La Mataviejitas (“la” indicating a female subject), produced by journalists, police authorities, criminologist and popular culture texts.
Abstract French

À partir de 1998, Mexico est le théâtre d’un nombre croissant d’homicides commis contre des femmes âgées. Il faut toutefois attendre cinq ans, soit en 2003, pour que des liens soient tissés par la police entre ces crimes. En 2005, la police avance l’hypothèse que plus de 40 de ces meurtres sont l’œuvre d’un tueur en série, qu’ils surnomment « El Mataviejitas » (l’assassin des vieilles dames, l’article « el » dénotant son identité masculine). Le modus operandi de l’assassin, selon la police, consiste à se déguiser et se faire passer pour une infirmière du programme Si Vale. Une fois qu’il a gagné la confiance de ces victimes, il les asphyxie à l’aide d’un stéthoscope ou d’un câble. Le 25 janvier 2006, la police appréhende Juana Barraza Samperio, lutteuse de profession, alors qu’elle s’enfuit du lieu où une femme de 89 ans a été étranglée avec un stéthoscope. L’assassin était en fait une assassine. Le lendemain, les journaux titrent : « Mataviejitas tombe après un autre crime : c’est une femme ». Ma thèse analyse la transformation des constructions sexuelles et genrées du tueur en série à travers les périodiques mexicains, qui le présentent tantôt comme un homme, tantôt comme un travesti. J’analyserai aussi les représentations que font les journalistes, la police, les criminologues et certains textes issus de la culture populaire de Juana Barazza en tant que La Dama del Silencio (la Dame du silence, son nom de lutteuse) et La Mataviejitas (l’article « la » dénotant cette fois-ci l’identité féminine du tueur).
Abstract Spanish

Desde 1998 los homicidios contra las mujeres de la tercera edad en la ciudad de México empezaron a registrarse de manera alarmante. Sin embargo, no fue sino en el 2003 que la policía reconoció un patrón común en los asesinatos y hasta el 2005 que reconoció la existencia de un asesino en serie mejor conocido como El Mataviejitas, responsable de la muerte por asfixia con un estetoscopio, medias o cables de más de 40 mujeres de la tercera edad al disfrazarse como enfermera del programa Si Vale. El 25 de enero del 2006 la policía capturó a una mujer, Juana Barraza Samperio, conocida en el la lucha libre como La Dama del Silencio, mientras huía de la casa donde una mujer de 89 años había sido asesinada con un estetoscopio. Al siguiente día los noticieros reportaron: "Cae Mataviejitas tras consumar otro de sus crímenes; es mujer." Mi tesis analiza el cambio en las construcciones sexuales y genéricas de las narrativas oficiales, criminológicas y en la prensa, cuando se pensaba El Mataviejitas era un hombre, y después un homosexual, travesti y/o transgénero. Mi tesis después se concentra en las representaciones de Juana Barraza como La Dama del Silencio y como La Mataviejitas en la prensa, por autoridades policíacas y su circulación en textos de cultura popular.
Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank my dear friend and supervisor Will Straw, who has subtly shaped my academic career. I am especially grateful because he believes in me and after every meeting somehow I feel way smarter than I actually am. Will’s constant material, intellectual and emotional support has been invaluable and his encouragement has made my MA and this thesis possible.

I also thank the staff at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada for their support. I am especially grateful to Johanne Bodileau for insisting and making sure I wrote this thesis. The office space provided at MISC was essential to the completion of this work.

I would also like to thank Maureen Coote and Susana Machado for their administrative support in the Art History and Communication Studies Department.

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Research Council for their financial support during the course work of my Masters, and the Internal Social Sciences and Research Council travel grants for their financial support during my research.

I thank Saydi Nuñez at El Colegio de México for her generosity in sharing her knowledge on female criminals during the porfiriato in México, and gracias a Graciela Martínez – Zalce por su apoyo académico en durante toda mi maestría. Y a mis ayudantes de investigación en la primera etapa de este proyecto, Deyanira, Sergio y Hugo Martínez Nayar por ir a la Hemeroteca Nacional y buscar a *La Mataviejitas* por mí. Y a Ali por apoyarme con material de investigación.

Much of this research has been shaped by the teachings of Carrie Rentschler in the courses Feminist Media Studies and Gender, Crime and Culture. My topic and its feminist approach would have not been possible without the material she taught in these courses.

Thanks to all my friends for their love and support: Dan, Lienne, Mory, Mauro, Kiva, Massimo, Joseph, Jenny, Ruby Max, Olive, and my sister Ace.

Saskia and I have shared more than we ever thought or wanted: experiences that have greatly shaped my modes of critiquing criminality. I am grateful for and in constant admiration of the courage and bravery we bring out on each other.

Muchas gracias a Damián, a quien afortunadamente siempre se le olvida todo excepto cuando lo necesito. A Román y a Marisa, por todas las veces que en el nombre de la investigación me hospedan en su casa en la Ciudad de Mexico.

Thanks to my friend Jackie Reid for endlessly listening to my ideas and frustrations and to Alison Jacques for providing me with much of the bibliography I used in this work, as well as for all her encouraging presents.
Le doy gracias a mi mamá por su constante apoyo en mis estudios.

Mi papá me ha enseñado la lección más grande: su continua despreocupación si hago una tesis, una disertación o un libro, me ha enseñado que lo más importante es disfrutar lo que hago. Esa lección y su constante apoyo siempre me acompañan.

Thanks to Gale and Marina, Owen, Dylan, Jeff and the baby on the way for all their love and support in any endeavour I take.

And finally, for more than I can imagine, I thank Jasmine Rault. Your encouragement, support and unconditional love have helped me grow and believe I can achieve anything. Sharing ideas with you and letting me steal some of yours have all contributed to this thesis and to who I am. We are the best team and I love you so very much. The best person in the world award is for Jasmine Rault.
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Chronology

1998
- 3 murders registered of elderly women following a similar pattern (asphyxiated with a stethoscope, tights or cables).

- 2 to 3 killings of elderly women per year following the same pattern.

5 November 2003
- Police recognize the possibility of a serial killer, El Mataviejitas, and describe a modus operandi: the serial killer dresses as a nurse from the government program Si Vale.

December 2003
- Police release the first sketch of El Mataviejitas.
- There are 9 to 12 (depending on the source) unresolved killings of elderly women.

2004
- Bernardo Bátiz, Chief of the Department of Justice of Mexico City, officially recognizes that there is a serial killer, El Mataviejitas.

March 2004
- Araceli Vázquez is arrested and convicted for the killing of one elderly woman.

September 2004
- Mario Tablas is arrested and convicted of the killing of two elderly women.
- 14 to 17 killings of elderly women.

2005
-- News reports state that killings of elderly women are increasing in number since 1998.
25 August 2005
- Police releases two more sketches of El/La Mataviejitas.
- Profile of the serial killer: Man with homosexual tendencies who dresses as woman.

5 October
- 46 people arrested because of their similarities with the serial killer.
- 8 to 11 (depending on the source) new killings of elderly women.

11 October 2005
- Another sketch of El Mataviejitas is released (Fig. 2)

24 October 2005
- 49 transvestites arrested because of their similarities with the serial killer.

16 November 2005
- Police present the three-dimensional sketch (Fig. 4).
- 41 unresolved murder cases of elderly women.

December
- Police believe the Mataviejitas has committed suicide.

10 January 2006
- French police teach a course to Mexican police.

25 January 2006
- Juana Barraza is arrested.

31 March 2008
- Juana Barraza is convicted for 11 or 16 (depending on the source) homicides of elderly women. She is sentenced to 759 years in prison.
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La Dama del Silencio. Photo published in several newspapers as well as in Barrón Cruz, Martín Gabriel. El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas. Ciudad de México: Editorial Océano de México, 2006.
Introduction: The political context

I was working in a translation company when I first heard the news: a female wrestler, Juana Barraza Samperio, was arrested as the presumed Mataviejitas - the serial killer of elderly women in Mexico City. I was familiar with the organized crime of the narcos and the cruelties of narcosatánicos in Mexico, but not with “the killing for the pleasure of killing” of serial killers, other than in the United States and in movies. I had never heard of a serial killer in Mexico before – and why should I? The only official serial killer in Mexico is Goyo Cárdenas, the famous sex-strangler of Mixcoac who, in 1942, long before I was born, “murdered 4 women - his girlfriend and three prostitutes - and buried them in the little garden of his house.”

Police reports (from various levels), periodicals (in Mexico and abroad), criminologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, novelists, musicians, and morbosos all hurried to a feast of interpretation and celebration. Everything about the story of a forty-five-year-old female wrestler serial killer in Mexico City expressed almost more than our imagination allowed.

A couple of months later, in the fall of 2006, everything came together: I was awarded a scholarship and admitted to a graduate program to pursue a Masters degree in Communication Studies, allowing me to follow my interest in non-normative genders and sexualities in Mexico, female criminality, popular culture and the production of mexicanidad. This research is the result of, in the words of Carlos Monsiváis, my own “precipitation to an interpretative feast” on police reports, periodicals, criminology texts, neuropsychologist analysis, music videos and a novel, all regarding the search for and investigation of the serial killer El (he) Mataviejitas, and the subsequent shift in identification to that of La (she) Mataviejitas, which came with the arrest and criminalization of Juana Barraza, who has been declared the first woman serial killer in Mexican history.

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The story of the Mataviejitas unfolded amidst the political turmoil of the presidential elections in Mexico. The election of 2006 promised to be one of the most momentous presidential races in Mexican history, with the alternative of a unified, leftist Latin America (following examples of Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Uruguay and Brazil) competing against a more conservative North American model (mirroring the terms of the United States’ George W. Bush and Canada’s Stephen Harper). The result of this election was a highly contested win by the conservative Felipe Calderón fronting the governing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Calderón was accused of fraud by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, ex-mayor of Mexico City from 2000 to 2005, who sold himself as the centre-left alternative from the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). This was the only time in Mexican history that presidential election results went through the Federal Electoral Tribunals (TRIFE), who were called upon to assesses the validity of the election.²

The recognition of serial homicides against older women became a battle of political powers between the Mexico City government (PRD) and the oppositional conservative federal government (PAN), both parties having a particular interest in promoting or denying the existence of *El Mataviejitas*. According to news reports in 2005, homicides of older women in Mexico City had been registering in increasing numbers beginning in 1998.³ By 2003, there were around 17 registered cases of elderly women murdered under similar circumstances: asphyxiated with random objects such as tights, cables, stethoscopes, or even the belts of their nightgowns.

Police began to trace patterns in these homicides and suggested the possibility of a serial killer, who came to be nicknamed “*El Mataviejitas*” (“the little old lady killer,” with the article “el” indicating a male subject), who was responsible for their murders. In every case the victims were women of 70 or more years of age, mostly lower class, and living

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alone near a park or garden.\textsuperscript{4} According to police, \textit{El Mataviejitas} gained the trust of the elderly women, since there was never any sign of broken or forced locks. Most important for the political battle was the modus operandi of \textit{El Mataviejitas}. According to police authorities, the alleged serial killer dressed in women’s clothing, pretending to be a nurse from the city’s government program \textit{Sí Vale}.\textsuperscript{5}

Earlier in 2001, López Obrador, then mayor of Mexico City, had created a program of public aid, \textit{Sí Vale}, which offered citizens over 70 years old the equivalent of 70 dollars a month, free public transportation and healthcare.\textsuperscript{6} The creation of this program exacerbated the already existing political tensions between the City and the Federal governments, which had very different views on social programs.

The federal government (PAN) insisted that Mexico City’s violence had increased dramatically since Obrador became Mexico City’s mayor and that the homicides of older women spoke to that. According to news reports, \textit{El Mataviejitas} killed elderly women who were registered in Mexico City’s controversial program of public aid for elderly citizens that Obrador had instituted. López Obrador denied the existence of a serial killer and blamed the \textit{El Mataviejitas} phenomenon on a conspiracy by the federal oppositional party against his social government policies. At the time, Obrador had been threatened with a prison sentence, for building a road—one which traversed private property—to a private hospital outside Mexico City’s perimeter. This was called the \textit{desafuero}, whose principal promoter was the Federal Government, under then president Vicente Fox. Obrador’s supporters believed the \textit{desafuero}’s only motivation was to impede Obrador’s campaigning for the presidency (as it might lead to his imprisonment).

However, Obrador graduated from popular mayor to social phenomenon in April 2005 when he called for a massive demonstration, called the “March of Silence,” against the

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desafuero. Close to one million people showed up at Mexico City’s main square to support him. After the march, Vicente Fox pulled out of the desafuero (although Mariana Gómez, a local PAN deputy, decided to post “bail” in court to free Obrador. Obrador said he would rather stand trial and go to jail since he “wasn’t guilty”).

Furthermore, Obrador suggested the killings of elderly women were isolated cases and blamed the media for magnifying the news. From the beginning of his term as mayor in 2001, until he left the position in July 2005 in order to campaign for presidency, Obrador denied the existence of a serial killer.⁷

The political pressure by the federal government to find El Mataviejitas increased by the end of 2005 as a consequence of three events. First, the narrowed presidential race became a war between Obrador (who was far ahead of the competition, dominating a variety of newspaper and TV polls) and Felipe Calderón (whose party engaged in US-style mongering against Obrador supporters, some, like Elena Poniatowska, belonging to the Mexican intellectual elite. Everyone got involved. Carlos Monsiváis, Carlos Montemayor, and internationally renowned writers like Eduardo Galeano, Doris Summer and Nobel Prize-winner Jose Saramago, who signed an open letter condemning the offences perpetrated against Poniatowska by Calderón’s PAN.⁸

The second event which intensified the search for El Mataviejitas was that by 2005, news sources reported an increase in the number of unresolved murders of elderly women, to 41 cases.⁹ The Mexico City Department of Justice created a special force to catch El Mataviejitas, called “Parques y Jardines” (Parks and Gardens). Parques y Jardines included more than 64 sketches of the possible serial killer, 70 thousand information pamphlets and posters distributed in government offices and public transportation, and organized surveillance by judicial police (dressed as civilians), and police patrols close to parks and gardens where police believed El Mataviejitas selected

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his victims. This was the only time in Mexican history that police initiated a search and an operation in order to arrest a serial killer.

The third factor influencing the pursuit of *El/la Mataviejitas* was that Bernardo Bátiz’s position as Chief of Mexico City’s Department of Justice was to end with the inception of the new administration after the 2006 elections. Bátiz had made it a priority to find *El Mataviejitas* before the end of his term.

Under political pressure and driven by ignorance, homophobia and international assumptions about serial killer behaviour, the police arrested 38 to 49 (depending on the source) male sex-workers, most of them homosexual. Police concluded that none of the captured transvestites were *El/la Mataviejitas*. Bátiz assured the public that “it might not be a transvestite but we are certain it is a transgendered person.”

The search for *El Mataviejitas* crystallized the power struggle between the Federal and City governments. PAN’s local deputy Mariana Gómez (who also offered to pay the bail for Obrador) “called for the resignation of Bernardo Bátiz”, chief officer of Mexico City’s Department of Justice, “if in the following 10 days Bátiz didn’t give concrete results regarding *El Mataviejitas*.” Members of the PRD denounced this as “clear media exploitation of the *El Mataviejitas* phenomenon in order to politically harm the local government.” Ten days later, deputies Gabriela González and Mariana Gómez stated that Bátiz “had failed in his charge as Procurador” (Chief of Mexico City Justice Department) as he didn’t find or arrest *El Mataviejitas*, and called on Bátiz to resign “for the sake of dignity.”

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9 Servín and Salgado, "De 1998 a La Fecha, 49 Asesinatos De Ancianos."
14 "Atacan Panistas Al Gdf Con El Tema Del "Mataviejitas": Trejo Pérez."
15 "Pediran Panistas Destituir a Bátiz Por No Atrapar Al "Mataviejitas"," *Agencia Mexicana de Noticias*, December 8 2005.
Finally, on the afternoon of January 25, 2006 a renter came home to find his 89-year-old landlady lying dead on the floor of her house. As he came in, he also saw a woman running away; he immediately shouted for help. Two policemen on patrol duty came to the rescue and after a short chase arrested Juana Barraza Samperio. The next day’s news read: “Mataviejitas falls after committing another crime: it’s a woman.”

It is worth noting that on the same day that Juana Barraza was arrested, another possible serial killer was caught too: Raúl Osiel Marroquín Reyes, who dismembered four gay men and stuffed them in suitcases. Before the detention of El Sádico (or El Matagays as he was subsequently called by the media) “no one knew of multiple homicides of homosexuals.” After his arrest, there was no mention of another serial killer.

A reporter in the newspaper La Jornada noted that “coincidences” like the capture of El Sádico (by federal officials) was reported the same day as the capture by “pure luck” of La Mataviejitas (by Mexico City officials) in “open competition” with the federals for the public; the paper suggested the federal officials were “showing their own theatre play so the stage was not occupied by the city officials.”

The news about El Sádico did not cause the media uproar that the identification of Juana Barraza as the Mataviejitas did. If Goyo Cárdenas had been the sensational case of the twentieth century, the arrest of a woman wrestler serial killer might become that of the twenty first century. In the two years since her arrest, there have been endless newspaper reports, two (bad) movies, a (catchy) song, a novel, two (bad) “scientific” books, and this thesis.

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16 Agustin Salgado and Mirna Servín, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer," La Jornada, January 26 2006.
18 Ibid.
Research focus and methodology

This thesis focuses mainly on the gendered shift in identification of the serial killer from *El Mataviejitas* to *La Mataviejitas*. My argument focuses on the process by which news coverage, police authorities, and criminologists shifted their accounts when the Mataviejitas was believed to be a man, then as a transvestite and finally a woman. This thesis is not concerned with the culpability of Juana Barraza but with the representations and approaches used by media and police authorities to conceptualize a female serial killer.

I made several research trips to Mexico City in order to look at newspaper reports in the Hemeroteca Nacional and the original pamphlets and sketches which police used in their search for *El/La Mataviejitas*. I visited the Department of Justice of Mexico City (one of their many offices) trying to get the original posters and sketches of *El/La Mataviejitas*, which I had only seen in newspapers. After many visits I was finally directed to the office of Comandante Victor Hugo Moneda, chief of the operations of “800 police corps responsible for the capturing of *La Mataviejitas*.”

I arrived for my appointment with Comandante Moneda on time at 7pm (after two hours of public transport); however, the person responsible for photocopying had already left for the day, making it “impossible” for me to get any documents and requiring that I return again the next day at 10 am. The next day, Comandante Moneda made time in his busy schedule to talk to me, amidst calls for homicides, the constant “rogering” and “copying” of his walkie-talkie, the noise of the TV (on which a daytime talk-show was assuring the public that female orgasm was possible), a shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and most importantly, four buff men with guns at his photocopying disposition. Comandante Moneda’s gun was on his desk.

I was given various photocopies of important documents, like the report the French police did on *El/La Mataviejitas* during a course they had given to police in Mexico City.

19 Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*. 
Comandante Moneda also explained to me the three different prototypes of the serial killer and his/her modus operandi. He was unable to tell me much as he was in the process of writing his own manuscript but assured me that he had shared more with me than with the movie producer who had approach him previously.

I was also very lucky to have had the opportunity to talk about my research with Carlos Monsiváis, Mexico’s leading cultural critic, whose comments solidified and shaped my approach.

My research, however, is mostly based on news reports in periodicals of major distribution in Mexico. My research in periodicals and police accounts of *El/La Mataviejitas* draws from Stuart Hall’s assertion of the “ideological interdependence between the media and the judiciary,” 20 in which media does in Lisa Duggan’s words, ‘narrativise’ material from police authorities. News reports appear as accounts of what happened in press conferences. 21 While some officials in the Department of Justice in Mexico City have accused news reports of “sensationalizing” the *El/La Mataviejitas* story, I take media and police authorities’ narrations as intersecting and complementing each other. Both media and police talked about a male serial killer and both were fixated on the arrest of Juana Barraza as a female serial killer.

Feminist criminology informs my methodology. I draw from the work of Lisa Duggan and Judith Walkowitz who “refuse the separation of the social life (reality) from representation (myth or stereotype).” 22 As such, I explore cultural representations of serial killers in films and literature in United States and in *la nota roja*, as well as accounts of female criminals and wrestlers in popular cultural forms like music videos and novels. I see those representations (of serial killers’ stereotypes or mythical figures in the construction of Mexican identity) as influencing, shaping and having an intertwined

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22 Ibid.
relationship with official accounts (police, criminological and media) of serial killing in Mexico.

I draw from those feminist and cultural theorists, who mobilize Foucault’s writings on discourse and analysis, the idea that cultural beliefs shape, influence and normalize behaviour, attitudes and knowledges about gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity. Moreover, these cultural beliefs, as well as society’s views, have an interdependent relationship with criminal justice systems, policy, and the media. Like Duggan and Walkowitz, I use an interdisciplinary approach from history, feminist criminology, political science and cultural theory, for my analysis.

Sources

I read over 200 news reports from a variety of perspectives, from the ‘leftist’ newspaper La Jornada, to more ‘traditional’ ones like El Universal and the avowedly centrist Reforma. I also looked at a newspaper of more limited distribution, Crónica, which is available online. At McGill I used the newspaper database FACTIVA to access the Mexican news service NOTIMEX. My research in news reports, police accounts and criminological texts covers the period 1998 to May 2008. I made use as well of the press releases of Mexico City’s Department of Justice, which are available online in their website “Noticias de la Procuraduría capitalina: http://www.pgjdf.gob.mx/noticias/comunicado.” All the news reports, police accounts and criminological texts in Spanish have been translated by me.


My main source on popular culture in Mexico is the writing of Carlos Monsiváis on *mexicanidad* in *Mexican Postcards* (1997), on *nota roja* in *Fuera De La Ley: La Nota roja En México, 1982-1990* (1992), and on *lucha libre* in *Lourdes Grobet: Lucha libre, Masked Superstars on Mexican Wrestling* (2008). I rely as well on the groundbreaking study of Mexican identity, *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, written by Octavio Paz in 1950, but I tried to contextualize it with the more recent readings of his work that Monsiváis has provided. Elena Poniatowska’s interviews with “El Santo: a dos de tres caídas” in *Todo México* (1990), as well as Miranda Fascinetto’s *Sin Máscara Ni Cabellera: Lucha libre En México Hoy* (1992) were my main source of information on *lucha libre*.

**Literature Review**

There are only two very different books devoted to *La Mataviejitas*. The first is a novel written by Victor Ronquillo, *Ruda de Corazon: El blues de La Mataviejitas* (2006), which narrates the story of *La Mataviejitas* in what he calls a journalistic novel. The second is a criminological account by criminologist and police collaborator Martin Barrón, entitled *Nudo del Silencio, Tras la pista de una asesina en serie: La Mataviejitas* (2006).

Stories on scandalous crimes after *La Mataviejitas* emerged in Mexico as novels or journalistic narrations. As such Norma Lazo’s book on the most shocking crimes in Mexico entitled *Sin Clemencia* was published in 2007 and narrates the stories that captivated Mexico’s imaginary, like “Las Poquianchis,” “la banda del automóvil gris”
and of course “los narcosatánicos.” Serial killing in Mexico took on new interests; three books were recently published, which include a section dedicated to *La Mataviejitas*. Ricardo Hamm, a self-proclaimed specialist on serial killers, wrote *Mexico y sus Asesinos seriales* (2007), however, its independent publication made its access hard to come by. Nevertheless, his opinions have been cited as that of an “expert” on newspaper reports on *La Mataviejitas* and serial killings in general. He also authored a booklet to accompany the exhibition on the Centro Cultural Policial on serial killers in 2007.

Finally, psychologist Feggy Ostrosky wrote a book entitled *Mentes Asesinas: la violencia en tu cerebro* (2008) on serial killers with a special section on *La Mataviejitas* where she narrates her personal interview with Juana Barraza, puts forth her take on Barraza’s life, and describes at length the scientific exams, neuropsychological among others, that she performed on Barraza. Ostrosky uses these exams and interviews as evidence that Juana Barraza is indeed *La Mataviejitas*.

I have used mainly books that deal with criminality in Mexico which are attentive to the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. On this I have found Robert Buffington’s book *Criminal and citizen in Modern Mexico* (2000) and Pablo Piccato’s *City of suspects: Crime in Mexico City 1900-1931* (2001) to be excellent historicized accounts of criminal discourses in Mexico during the Porfiriato (1870-1910).

From a popular culture perspective, I found it important to pay attention to the press and *nota roja* (“red news” -- chronicling of violence and crime in Mexico City). I only found one book on *nota roja* published in 1992, by different authors who collaborated in the *nota roja* periodicals, entitled *Fuera de la Ley; a Nota roja En México, 1982-1990* (1992), with a prologue by Carlos Monsiváis. The prologue was later translated in 1997 as part of the book *Mexican Postcards* for the series on Critical Studies in Latin American and Iberian Cultures published by Verso.

There are few academic studies dealing with female criminality in Mexico. Juana Barraza has been included in recent criminological texts (mentioned above). The scarce work on
female criminality in Latin America focuses on showing the differences between men and women from a scientific viewpoint based on qualitative and quantitative research, and focuses mostly on the colonial period and the process of independence.\textsuperscript{25} To date there is no scholarship concerning cultural representations of crime and the social discourses on women and gender in Mexico.\textsuperscript{26}

Studies of criminality in general in Mexico also draw on qualitative and quantitative research in order to differentiate types of criminals according to their crimes. These studies developed mostly in the period of Porfiriato – a defining time in Mexican history (after the independence from Spain, 1810, and before the Revolution, 1910) when the notions of “progress and order” defined sciences like criminology, medicine and law. These studies were performed by positivist scientists like Carlos Roumagnac, Rafael Zayas, and Francisco Martinez Bacca.

An MA thesis written by Saydi Cecilia Nunez from El Colegio de México on “discourses, gender and transgression of female criminals in Mexico during 1877-1910” is one of the few historical works on female criminality in Mexico which is attentive to the socio-political discourses and representations of the period being studied.

\textsuperscript{25} Saydi Cecilia Núñez Cetina, “Delito, Género Y Transgresiones: Los Discursos Sobre La Criminalidad Femenina En La Ciudad De México, 1877-1910” (Colegio de México, 2005).
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
Chapter overview

The first chapter, “Framing a serial killer: El Mataviejitas in Mexico City,” focuses on the difficulties in conceptualizing a serial killer in Mexico and how this actually affected the search for El/La Mataviejitas. First, I concentrate on Mexico’s cultural beliefs concerning serial killing. Second, I analyze the significance of the serial killers in modern societies, comparing the case of El/La Mataviejitas with other significant crimes in Mexico. Third, I centre the analysis on the police assumption that the serial killer of elderly women was a man, based on international patterns according to which serial killers are almost invariably male. Finally, I concentrate on the police authorities’ belief that El Mataviejitas was transvestite/homosexual. I further explore the belief that homosexuality equals sexual failure, which correlates heavily with serial killing.

Chapter Two, “The look of a serial killer: La Mataviejitas,” concentrates on the visual material police and criminologist used in their search and to identify El/La Mataviejitas, as well as the text that accompanies it, focusing specifically on the sex and gender tensions between the sketches and the police and media narrations. The visuals I make reference to were published in newspapers and distributed all around Mexico City, including a three-dimensional sketch police released of the El Mataviejitas, as well as two other sketches that were made available to me by Comandante Moneda from the Procuraduría de Justicia del Distrito Federal (Department of Justice of Mexico City).

I then analyze the tension that the sketches pose between portraying a prototype of a serial killer and the actual portrait of El/La Mataviejitas, especially considering the sex and gender discrepancies in the visuals and texts. The third section of this chapter problematizes the assumption that criminality is innate and thus visible through physical traits revealed in photographs and sketches. It does so by historicizing criminality discourses in Mexico. The fourth section pays particular attention to the shift in gendered and sexed constructions around the Mataviejitas in criminologists’ and police authorities’ texts and news media’s approaches when a woman was arrested, and how the sketches were then re-interpreted and re-presented. The final section of this chapter examines a set
of the photographs of Juana Barraza’s “looks” as evidence that Barraza is La Mataviejitas, published by criminologist and police collaborator Martín Barrón, in his book El nudo del silencio (2006).

Finally the last chapter, “Performing mexicanidad: lucha libre and criminalidad,” focuses on the intersection of the discourses of criminology and those of lucha libre spectacle by analyzing the merging of personas. La Mataveijitas, the serial killer disguised as a nurse, and La Dama del Silencio, the wrestler persona adopted by Juana Barraza, that have been used by media and police as evidence that Juana Barraza is La Mataviejitas, and that have served to criminalize La Dama del Silencio more so than Juana Barraza. In this chapter I argue that discourses of criminality and the spectacle of lucha libre intersect within Mexican culture to police and perform the parameters of mexicanidad, reinforcing the limits of Mexican masculinity and femininity but also revealing these limits as subject to redefinition.

Finally in this last chapter, I show how lucha libre contributes to the production of Mexicanidad, through an analysis of the performances that constitute it, with particular attention to news accounts of Juana Barraza’s wrestling practice. I analyze criminality discourses regarding Juana Barraza as La Dama del Silencio by criminologists Barrón and Ostrosky, who have played a predominant role in determining Barraza’s culpability through the science of criminology. Second, I point out the challenges that Barraza, in her identities as La Dama del Silencio and as La Mataviejitas pose to the notion of Mexicanidad. Finally, I will look at how the merged persona of La Mataviejitas and La Dama del Silencio has circulated in popular culture through a song and music video by underground singer Amandititita, a novel by Victor Ronquillo entitled Ruda de Corazón: El Blues de La Mataviejitas (2006), and a video in the Centro Cultural Policial (Police Cultural Centre) in downtown Mexico City.
Framing the serial killer: *El Mataviejitas* in Mexico

Serial killing is very uncommon in Mexico. Before *El Mataviejitas* there had never been a police investigation and prosecution of a serial killer. Police authorities’ accounts of serial killers in Mexico before *El Mataviejitas* are contradictory. In Mexico, as in the United States, there seem to be different accounts regarding the qualifying number of murderers and temporal proximity of their execution in how a serial killer is defined. Many criminologists use the FBI definition “as involving an offender associated with the killing of at least four victims”\(^{27}\) and although the FBI specifies a period of “greater than seventy-two hours,”\(^{28}\) there are many contradictory versions of the time in between murders. I am not interested in defining who is a serial killer but in pointing out the narratives and presumptions used by criminologists, police and the media in recognizing a serial killer.

This chapter focuses on the difficulties in conceptualizing a serial killer in Mexico, showing the cultural clash of the unquestioned adoption of the United States’ and European narrations of serial killers. This analysis reveals how cultural understandings of serial killing and international assumptions actually affected the search for *El/La Mataviejitas*. First I give a brief account of serial killers in Mexico.

According to the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal* (Mexico City’s Department of Justice from now on) there was one serial killer before *El Mataviejitas*: Gregorio Cardenas, a.k.a El Goyo or the Mixcoac Strangler. In 1942, Goyo killed at least four women and buried them in his garden.\(^{29}\) Goyo was later considered a testament to the effectiveness of the reformatory system; in jail Goyo became a lawyer, a painter, wrote five books, and upon release he dedicated his life to helping prisoners of low income.\(^{30}\) For Martín Gabriel Barrón Cruz, a criminologist and historian working as a

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Juan Carlos Aguilar García, "La Mataviejitas Pertenece Al Tipo De Asesino Serial Sin Plan," *Crónica*, January 28 2006, 149.
collaborator with the Department of Justice of Mexico City during the investigation of *El Mataviejitas*, the first serial killer in Mexico was “El Chalequero,” who in the nineteenth century killed at least thirteen sex workers.\(^{31}\)

The Centro Cultural Policial (Police Cultural Center) in Mexico City, in 2007 released a pamphlet to accompany its exhibition on serial killers. In the section on serial killers in Mexico, aside from El Chalequero and El Goyo, there is mention of “Las Poquianchis,” the Gonzales sisters who for more than 20 years hired lower class young women, promising them work as maids in their cantina (bar) but exploited them sexually for their clients.\(^{32}\) However, there is not a consensus as to whether Las Poquianchis were serial killers or not. Even the curator of the exhibition, Ricardo Ham, in his book *México y sus asesinos seriales* (2008), doesn’t consider Las Poquianchis to be serial killers “since their motive was economical” and further states that “serial killers’ motive is specifically a variety of psychological needs, power and sexual compulsion.”\(^{33}\) Police found around “80 women’s bodies, 11 men and many fetuses” in *La Barca de Oro*, (“the golden ship,)” the Poquianchis’ cantina.

The pamphlet also includes “El Padrino Constanzo” and Sara Alderete, who in 1989 were found guilty of the homicide of fourteen people “sacrificed during a satanic ritual.”\(^{34}\) News media nicknamed them the *Narcosatánicos* because of their involvement in satanic rituals (in which police participated and performed with the protection of evil spirits) and their drug dealing alike. Constanzo loved cruelty, as it was necessary for the “consolidation of his tyranny.”\(^{35}\) He showed no limits, killing, murdering and mutilating in a genuine “gore” movie style, leaving “bodies cut to pieces and bones made into necklaces.”\(^{36}\) Constanzo enjoyed immunity from the police in Mexico, killing equally transvestites, drug addicts and policemen. What ended his kingdom was “ignoring the

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\(^{34}\) Ham and Enríquez, "Exposición Asesinos Seriales," 21.

\(^{35}\) Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*, 164.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
most basic rule: using his power only so far as he does not cause any serious problems.”

Constanzo crossed the line by kidnapping, torturing and murdering a foreign student named Mark Liroy. Constanzo killed himself when police found him.

Sara Alderete is still in prison, and she has found in literature a new passion. She has written a book entitled *Me dicen la Narcosatánica* (“They call me the Narcosatanic”) and an essay, “El amor mata lo que ama” (“Love kills what it loves”), relating her experiences of love and crime. Her writing has received numerous awards from prestigious organizations in Mexico City, like the José Revueltas award, as well as recognition from the National Institute of Fine Arts.

Finally, the pamphlet also recounts the activities of Mexican serial killers in the United States, like Juan Corona, who was found guilty of the 1971 killings of 25 illegal workers in California, and Rafael Resendiz, who was sentenced to death in the United States in June 2006 for the killing of more than four people.

Despite contradictory accounts as to who is named a serial killer in Mexico, it is most important to note that Mexico City’s Justice Department never started a search or investigation of a designated serial killer. There have been no news reports talking about their modus operandi, no psychological profiles, and no reports on a serial killer’s name or number of victims prior to the killer being found. All these people have been determined to be serial killers (or not) after their capture.

While a growing number of elderly women were killed according to similar patterns since 1998, Mexico City’s Department of Justice didn’t recognize the possibility of a serial killer of elderly women until 2003. It was not until 2005 that Mexico City’s chief Police, Bernardo Bátiz, declared the existence of a serial killer of elderly women and started the exhaustive search “Parques y Jardines,” distributing pamphlets (Fig. 1)

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 165.
alerting the elderly population to not “trust strangers.” Moreover, at least 64 sketches of the possible Mataviejitas were created and displayed in every police car and municipality where police had registered most of the crimes. 100 Mexican police officers even received a special week-long training by French police authorities in techniques that would help them arrest the serial killer of elderly women. However the success of the training seemed questionable as French police insisted that in order to arrest El Mataviejitas it was necessary to perform DNA tests and Mexican police had no traces of saliva, blood, semen or hair.\footnote{Óscar Herrera, "Importan Curso Sobre Homicidios Seriales," \textit{El Universal}, 10 January 2006.}

In the next section, I focus on the news reports and police declarations concerning \textit{El/La Mataviejitas} during the period from 1998 to January 25th, 2006 (a day before the arrest of Juana Barraza.) More specifically, I will focus on police beliefs as to who is a serial killer. I contrast these declarations with popular cultural forms that represent crime and violence in Mexico City, like movies and periodicals such as \textit{la nota roja}. Second, I analyze the significance of the serial killers in modern societies comparing \textit{El/La Mataviejitas} with other significant crimes in Mexico, with particular attention to police narratives on the victims. Third, I center my analysis on the police assumption that the serial killer of elderly women was a man, an assumption based on international patterns in which serial killers are almost invariably male. Finally, I concentrate on the police authorities’ belief that \textit{El Mataviejitas} was a transvestite/homosexual. This belief, I will show is likewise imported from international accounts of serial killers.

\textbf{Narcosatánicos versus Serial Killers}

In 2005, during a symposium on serial killing in the University La Salle in Mexico City, a year before the arrest of Juana Barraza, Renato Sales Heredia, the sub-prosecutor of Averiguaciones Previas (Inquiries office) of the Department of Justice of Mexico City started his talk by announcing: “a terrifying and new phenomenon: the presence, now indisputable, of a serial killer. That which happens to us today didn’t happen to us before;
happened in movies, in the United States. However, violence and crime have also become
globalized – the serial killer of elderly women, *El Mataviejitas*, is an example of this.\textsuperscript{41}

The idea of a serial killer in Mexico City, despite the city’s high rates of criminality,
seemed almost unimaginable. It almost appeared as if the “now indisputable” presence of
a serial killer, *El Mataviejitas*, allegedly responsible for more than forty homicides of
elderly women, was the last straw in a cycle of violence. The presence of the serial killer
in Mexico seemed like a recognition that Mexico City had crossed the line in terms of
violence. What is it about a serial killer that seems so evil and monstrous in a city where
violence escalates to horrifying levels? Why was a serial killer worse than
narcosatánicos?

Mark Seltzer discusses the emergence of serial killing as part of the United States’
“wound culture,” a “public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened
persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound.”\textsuperscript{42} This “addiction
to violence” is represented in different popular cultural forms, such as films and TV
shows. I believe it is the circulation of the United States’ public fascination with open
bodies that resonates with Mexico’s own wound culture and at the same time creates a
distinction between those whom Mexicans believe to be our own monsters. That is the
narcosatánicos and the United States style serial killer.

I don’t believe there are many accounts of narcosatánicos in the United States’ popular
culture; however, the figure of serial killer occupies a prominent place in criminology and
in literary and film fiction. Seltzer has pointed out how serial murder and its
representations are the “most popular genre-fiction of the body and the bodily violence”\textsuperscript{43}
of the United States’ culture. There is an ongoing fascination with the serial killer in
criminological studies and popular cultural forms, especially Hollywood movies.

\textsuperscript{42} Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, 1.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
Similarly, Caroline Picart has noted regarding serial killing, that “it is apparent that criminological fact and literary fiction have become irretrievably intertwined.”

Films based on “true” cases such as Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, Ed Gein: The True Story (2001), Silence of the Lambs (1991), and Hannibal (2001), among others, blur the line between fiction and actuality, implying a treatment of “facts” and thus contributing to the creation of a male serial killer construct. Picart noted that all these films have “specifically chosen” main characters that are “all white young males – a rare area in which fact and fiction converge in so far as most serial killers who have been caught fit this raced and sexed demographic.”

In all these movies, the young white male serial killers get transformed into the terrifying yet compelling embodiment of evil, and as Seltzer notes, serial killing is “represented as at once a horrific departure from normalcy and as abnormally normal.” That is, a somehow normal person who has a family, job, and friends holds an obscure past (or obscure pathology) that suddenly gets detonated, transforming him into a monster. Someone, just like you and me or our neighbour (as long as it is a white young male) could be a serial killer.

What is important to highlight is that, where fiction and criminological facts are so entangled, the US-based popular-culture representation of sexed and gendered serial killers leaves out any possible identification with any different raced and sexed populations, like Latino Americans, African Americans or Asians, thus contributing to the construct of serial killers as a predominantly white phenomenon.

Moreover, the places where most of these films and TV crime shows take place, like Crime Scene Investigation (CSI), with its franchises in Vegas, Miami and New York, is in the United States – different streets, jobs, characters, language, different ways of

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.: 45.
47 Seltzer, Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture, 6.
interacting that are not familiar in Mexico, thus contributing to the belief that serial killing is in the streets, houses, and among people of the United States.

On the other hand, the representation of crime in literature and films that reference Mexico City hardly deals with themes of serial killing. Mexico City is a recurrent space for national films where the theme of violence is predominant and clearly socially stratified. Take for example the films set in Mexico City in the latest decade: films like Lolo (1999), De la Calle (2000), Perfume de violetas, nadie te oye (2000) and Ciudades oscuras (2002) portray lower-class crime as the result of poverty and marginalization, whereas films like Amores Perros (2000) or Un mundo raro (2001) show the crimes of the middle class as limited to corruption, adultery and blackmail. 48

These films represent criminals and crimes according to their sexed and social status, wherein the lower classes kill violently while upper-middle classes’ crimes are limited to white-collar felonies. 49 The crimes are identifiable to a Mexican public and are detonated by a well known ideology in Mexico, “machismo,” 50 which usually involves cases of domestic violence. In all these films Mexico City is named as a place where the crimes take place. Using the specific name of a city in a fictional text calls for a recognition that goes further than the texts and visuals represented in the film: “a proper name remits us to reality.” 51 Moreover, naming Mexico City in all these films obliges the viewer to associate the narration with that of news reports, thus further relating the crimes and criminals to a reality that is familiar to Mexicans. In brief, films situated in Mexico City deal with crime in a way that is recognizable to the Mexican viewers and is different to viewers from the United States, creating distinct imaginaries of crimes and criminals.

Another prevalent cultural form in Mexico City that deals with crime is the narrations of nota roja (red news) – “a term for the chronicling of violence and crime in Mexico”

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
through different popular cultural periodicals such as *alarma, alerta, metropoliaca* and *agente confidencial*, among others.\(^\text{52}\) Even though police chronicles had been part of periodicals, since 1895 *la nota roja* provided a space for “censorship and proscription of a new morality towards the formation of a certain social norms.”\(^\text{53}\) *Nota roja* not only narrated the sensational news of the time, but “openly expressed an opinion reinforcing gender stereotypes” where “religious opinions, criminologists, and elites defined the parameters of women and criminality.”\(^\text{54}\) During the second half of the nineteenth century, *nota roja* served to signal the governing elite’s vision of criminality, social control and its association with popular sectors.\(^\text{55}\) *Nota roja*, as part of the press, became a way to construct “public opinion.”\(^\text{56}\)

In the early sixties, *Alarma* became one of the most representative periodicals of *nota roja*, owing its popularity to the reports on Las Poquianchis, and maintaining that popularity until today. The letterhead of the periodical *Alarma* gives the appearance of individual letters painted by fingers in blood, followed by an exclamation mark.\(^\text{57}\) *Alarma*, like the rest of *nota roja*, is characterized for its explicitly graphic gruesome content. *Nota roja* is more about the morbidity of body parts frozen in the photographs than the writing itself. The front page normally has a close up photograph of the dead victim in the crime scene as left by the criminal, full of bloody details, disfigured or burned, welcoming the reader “into a world of death and scandal.”\(^\text{58}\)

Carlos Monsiváis explains that *nota roja* “constitutes one of Mexico’s greatest novels, from which everyone may retain the fragmentary memory that typifies for them an idea of crime, corruption and plain bad luck.”\(^\text{59}\) As such, the crimes that stay in our memory

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\(^\text{53}\) Núñez Cetina, "Delito, Género Y Transgresiones: Los Discursos Sobre La Criminalidad Femenina En La Ciudad De México, 1877-1910".
\(^\text{54}\) Ibid., 146-48.
\(^\text{55}\) Ibid., 139.
\(^\text{56}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{58}\) Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*, 149.
\(^\text{59}\) Ibid.
are not those of serial killers (except for the Mexican Jack the Ripper, Goyo Cárdenas) but those of Las Poquianchis, narcosatánicos, organized crime, and endless cases of domestic violence “when passions get loose, when madness, greed, jealousy and lechery, a total loss of control, provided the rationale for unexpected desire.”\textsuperscript{60} “Nota roja transforms tragedy into spectacle into moralist warning into relajo (a sort of fun) but most importantly into stories of a collectivity,”\textsuperscript{61} where, aside from our vindicated narcos, there is no space for stranger killings. This kind of visual representation is familiar in Mexico, especially among the working classes, consequently setting Mexico’s imaginary of crime and violence differently from that of the United States.

In both films and \textit{nota roja}, the majority of crimes portrayed result from passions letting loose, jealousy, adultery (domestic violence) or greed, money laundering, corruption (drug trade), almost inevitably among people who know each other. Murder, even brutal murder, is a result of passion, resentment, lechery, bribery, fraud, or insecurity, but not an isolated case of stranger killing. Criminal violence as represented in these visual cultural forms has fixed the limits in which we are separated from the unexpected threats of “a mentally deranged person [who] may suddenly cross the path of someone like you; one day a young couple open the door confidently, letting in the evil that will be their downfall – a crime which, on exhibiting their intimacy, will blow it up to enormous sinful proportions.”\textsuperscript{62}

Crime and violence are distinguished very clearly through different popular cultural forms in the United States and Mexico. While, arguably, both countries have a wound culture whose public is fascinated with torn open bodies and persons, the representation of crimes and violence comes from different traditions, thus distinguishing the “types” of criminals and the “types” of crimes in each country, and in doing so establishes and reaffirms the different national identities.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 148.
It is not only Hollywood movies and popular TV shows which have cast serial killing as a United States phenomenon. Criminological texts have also contributed to this notion. As Seltzer points out, serial killing “wounds an idealized American culture that is at the same time seen as a wound culture.” Moreover, other accounts of serial killing observes that “as the influence of American culture spreads to less developed countries … the fear is that, unless checked somehow, the disease of serial murder will spread as well.” The Mexican public fascination with open bloody bodies echoes the United States’ wound culture and its representation in popular culture. However, I argue, it most importantly functions as a way to set Mexico apart from the United States’ wound culture, which is believed in Mexico to be worse. Serial killing is worse simply because it is a United States phenomenon. That is to say, to acknowledge the existence of a serial killer in Mexico is to question Mexican identity.

The Mexican idea that there are not serial killers in Mexico is based on the prejudicial belief that serial killing is a United States phenomenon commonly portrayed in different popular culture crime shows, films and criminological texts. A serial killer is worse than a narcosatánico because a serial killer happens in the United States. Serial killers and mass murderers are worse than narcosatánicos not in relation to the brutal killings themselves or the qualifying numbers of killings but as a way of separating national identities.

Serial killers and Mexican anomie

Crime and violence in the United States, specifically serial killing, or strange killing as it was called before, is believed to be worse, I argue, because the figure of the serial killer signifies a modern anomie, that is, the weakening of the social bonds that lead people to know and care about each other. The United States and European countries are perceived in Mexico as individualistic societies where the malaise of individuals, characterized by a lack of moral values, drives individuals to the cold brutality of killing strangers.

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63 Seltzer, Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture, 6.
64 Ibid.
In Mexico City, the killing of elderly women was worth the recognition of government officials, apart from any political tensions between federal and Mexico City’s administration, because the murdering of elderly women living alone is further perceived as a sign of anomie. The aloneness of elderly women is interpreted by authorities and media as “abandonment by their families.” In a culture where family values are institutionalized and the figure of the mother is that of a saint (because mothers are constantly sacrificing for their children; devoted, self-denying, selfless victims), the elderly women who live alone are signs of a family that abandoned them, a society that neglects them. The possibility of an elderly woman choosing to live alone is at odds with the values of a traditional, Catholic, conservative society.

Authorities believe that older women living alone “only have solitude, which is why when someone talks to them they trust them immediately.” Homicides against elderly women have been interpreted as something “wrong with society.” These views on elderly women contrast with an awful, still unresolved, series of crimes of gender violence in México known as “Las Muertas de Juárez.” More than 460 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juárez, north of México, and according to the National Human Rights Commission report (November 2003) 4,587 women have disappeared. Most of them are young, poor mestizo women who have died in similar circumstances after being raped, tortured and dismembered.

In spite of public outrage and international pressure from non-governmental organizations, officials continue to deny gender violence in the homicides against women in Cd. Juárez. Local and national authorities have failed to prevent, investigate or punish these crimes. Yet it is the killing of elderly women in Mexico City that has officially

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65 Nájar, "La Cacería De El Mataviejitas, El Costo De Negar Al Asesino."
67 Nájar, "La Cacería De El Mataviejitas, El Costo De Negar Al Asesino."
68 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
shown a “dehumanized” society. Seltzer points out that “senseless’ murder is where our most basic senses of the body and society, identity and desire, violence and intimacy, are secured or brought to crisis.”

The homicides of young mestizo women, despite the alarming number and circumstances of murder, are bodies that do not bring a patriarchal society like Mexico into crisis. Why is it that the homicides of homosexuals in Mexico City (which occurred at the same time than those of elderly women) and the homicides of more than 400 women in Cd. Juárez are bodies that don’t count for the Mexican government? Why is gender violence not fully recognized? Why have media and police only recognized the existence of a serial killer in the homicides against elderly women?

Richard Quinney argues in “Who is the Victim” that a “victim is a conception of reality as well as an object of events. All parties involved in any sequence of actions construct the reality of the situation.” Quinney suggests that the conceptions of victims are socially constructed from one segment of society to another, and I would add from one culture to another. In my attempt to answer these questions, I argue that homicides against elderly women have counted to the point of leading to the acknowledgement, pursuit and capture of a serial killer because, on the one hand, there was particular political interests in the promotion and recognition of a serial killer in Mexico City and on the other, the recognition of homicides against elderly women represented the loss of family values and the decomposition of a society that abandons its elder citizens. The serial killer commits what Seltzer calls a “senseless” crime; victims represent bodies that bring society into crisis. The conception of a victim is shaped by personal and social values. In this way, elderly women, whom police believed to be abandoned by their family and society, are counted as victims in a conservative, moralistic and traditional culture. They are distinct from, the bodies of younger mestizo women, whose cruel and horrible murders don’t count in a patriarchal society where “local and state authorities continually stigmatize the victims as prostitutes and drug addicts.”

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73 Ibid.: 318.
The existence of *El/La Mataviejitas* in Mexico was for police a sign of a society in decay because the serial killer of elderly women represented that Mexico City had graduated from brutal killings (like those of Cd. Juárez – where apparently there are no serial killers) to a modern anomie where family values had weakened; Mexico City had become a “dehumanized society,” argued by Pedro Borda, from the National Institute of Elderly Persons (Inapam). 75 Similarly Báñez prioritized finding the serial killer since the murders were against “a helpless, very vulnerable sector of society, which before was respected, even among delinquency.”76 Renato Sales Heredia even stated that the killing of elderly women didn’t happen in municipalities where elderly women live in the “nuclear family.”77

**Searching for El Mataviejitas**

As soon as the existence of a serial killer was declared in Mexico City, police had recourse to a certain set of characteristics, personality traits and class traits, applicable to any individual believed to be a serial killer. This belief was constrained by gender and sexed representations; the serial killer tends to always be characterized as a man. On this basis, police started to search for El (masculine) Mataviejitas.

There have been numerous accounts of the assumed male nature of serial killers. Richard Collier has examined “the ways in which the (sexed) bodies of men” are constituted “as an ‘absent presence’ within contemporary discourses around crime and criminality.”78 According to Collier this “absent presence” of men in crime is due to the unexplored fact about crimes in general: “that it is almost always committed by men.”79 As stated earlier it could well be the case that most serial killers caught in the United States to date fit this sexed and gendered characteristic, but that doesn’t mean all white young men are potential serial killers or all serial killers have to be white young males. What is

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75 Nájar, "La Cacería De El Mataviejitas, El Costo De Negar Al Asesino."
77 Heredia, "Seis Visiones En Busca De Un Serial."
79 Ibid., 179.
problematic is not only the unquestioned “absent presence” of whiteness and maleness in serial killing in official literature and popular culture but, most importantly, how this belief actually had an impact upon the investigation of *El/La Mataviejitas*.

According to Renato Sales Heredia, the sub-prosecutor of Investigaciones Previas (Inquiries office in the Department of Justice of Mexico City), “more than 90% [of serial killers] are men; with superior or normal intelligence to the average; suffered physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; come from unstable or disintegrated families; and had since childhood tendencies to fetishism or sadomasochism.”\(^{80}\) The description that authorities have given of *El Mataviejitas* corresponds to every other international account of serial killers, largely based on certain male traits of known serial killers such as United States’ Ted Bundy or England’s Jack the Ripper, both middle-aged white males who killed an unknown number of young women and who have become the “prototype” of a serial killer. However, as Seltzer points out, “the absence of any knowledge of the identity of the killer has made Jack the Ripper the prototype of the serial killer.”\(^{81}\)

*El Mataviejitas* was believed by authorities to share the characteristics of serial killers in the United States. Just like Ted Bundy, who has been constantly characterized in popular culture and official literature as “charismatic” and “brilliant,” Bernardo Bátiz, Chief prosecutor of the Department of Justice of Mexico City at the time, qualified the Mataviejitas as a person with a “brilliant mind, very astute, and cautious.”\(^{82}\) Moreover, a criminologist collaborating in the search for *El Mataviejitas*, Martín Barrón, stated that the majority of these killers are “maniacs of order, fetishists, with perfect control of themselves, high IQ, stable job, childhood emotional disorders, married and with kids.”\(^{83}\) Prosecutors based their assumptions on the stereotyped male serial killers of the United States who are commonly qualified as “brilliant” and whose “actions are naturalized as male.”\(^{84}\)

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80 Heredia, "Seis Visiones En Busca De Un Serial."
83 Padilla and Pérez, "Tarda Hasta 20 Años Captura De Asesinos."
These descriptions reveal more about police beliefs concerning the characteristics of a serial killer, beliefs imported from United States, than on any actual knowledge of *El/Abuson En Infancia De Asesino En Serie,* As Seltzer points out, there is nothing more visible in the proliferating “official literature on serial killing than its relentless banality.” The official literature on serial killing is almost useless due to its constant contradictions. For example, on the one hand Alan Fox and Jack Levin have stated that serial killers kill people known to them and act methodically. On the other, it has been explained in some criminological studies that the brutality of serial violence is linked to its impersonality, that is, the killing of strangers, in which “there need be no motives of hatred, rage, jealousy, or greed at work; the victim need not have taunted, threatened, or abused the killer.” These contradictory accounts of serial killing seem to be simply adopted by Mexican prosecutors. Police have described the characteristics of *El Mataviejitas* exactly the same way: “distinguishable because there was no personal relation between the victim and the criminal. The homicide is not moved by jealousy, revenge or money.” However, the police have also stated that *El Mataviejitas* was driven to kill elderly ladies because of a “deep resentment” towards a feminine figure, probably because of childhood abuse.

In the United States, serial killing is viewed by the criminal justice system, criminological research and the media as a predominantly male crime. This has been adopted without questioning by Mexico City’s own criminological system. Both countries, like many in the western world, shared the believed that female offenders are an “exceptional case.” Women kill their husbands or kids, and the crimes are due to passionate impulses or marginalization. Candice Skrapec notes “the amazement at the revelation that women have long been, and continue to be, multiple murderers,” because this notion “violates the idea of femaleness” which is “tied to her traditional nurturing

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85 Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture.*
88 Heredia, "Seis Visiones En Busca De Un Serial."
role.” In fact, as Skrapec has noted, there are many female serial killers in United States and throughout the world that share many similarities with male serial killers. Female serial murders are from diverse backgrounds (impoverished individuals or privileged classes or nobility) killing for personal gain, satisfaction or sexual motives. The impossibility of thinking of a female serial killer and the idea that sexual failure correlates with serial killing is explored in the next section.

**Searching for El/La Mataviejitas**

As a response to the supposed novelty of the serial killer phenomena in Mexico, Renato Sales stated that “Mexico City’s Ministerio Público must have enough bravery to recognize that it needs help” and since the serial killer phenomenon has been associated primary with the United States, the Ministerio Público then “must ask for help from the United States” (among other countries) “who have suffered [the serial killer phenomenon] for a long time and have developed the “criminal profiling” technique, which according to Sales Heredia, is based in the meticulous analysis of the crime scenes.”

The profiling of El/Mataviejitas defined the places where police searched for the serial killer, but most importantly, this profiling defined the sex, gender, class and ethnicity of the alleged Mataviejitas. An analysis of the police authorities’ profile reveals more assumptions rooted in the patterns of international crime scenes than in actual knowledge of El/La Mataviejitas in Mexico City.

From criminologists to police authorities to feminist academics, there has been a wide consensus that there is not in Mexico a “scientific” system to arrest serial killers and that as a result, Mexican police should rely on the United States. Profilers in the United States are believed to be effective and necessary since they “studied the case and elaborated a

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91 Ibid., 243.
92 Heredia, "Seis Visiones En Busca De Un Serial."
profile of the killer, put their finger on it with impressive frequency.” 93 However, as Seltzer has pointed out, “profilers have all in all been generally ineffectual in tracking down the killers.” Seltzer even quotes an FBI serial homicide ex-agent who, in a Vanity Fair interview referring to profiling, stated: “I mean, how many serial killer cases has the FBI solved – if any!” 94 In Mexico City, the profile of El/La Mataviejitas didn’t seem to have helped arrest the killer, but rather served to expose the banality and futility of profiling.

Despite witness accounts of a “tall, 1.70m, robust woman with black hair” or descriptions such as “I believe it was a woman, I am not sure because [she] was very tall. But she was blond and short haired. [She] used glasses and had a bag,” 95 or accounts of a woman who supposedly worked for the city government’s program, authorities based their profile of El Mataviejitas on international accounts of serial killing, which are almost invariably a male killer. Witnesses’ descriptions of the Mataviejitas as a woman or appearing like a woman were almost completely ignored because of the gendering and sexing of the serial killer construct, in which it is believed that a woman could not be a serial killer.

In 2005, police presented a profile of El Mataviejitas after investigations undertaken since 2003. The physical profile of El Mataviejitas was as follows: “a man, dressed as a woman, or a robust woman, dressed in white, height between 1.70 and 1.75 mts., robust complexion, light brown, oval face, wide cheeks, blonde hair, delineated eyebrows, approximately 45 years old.” 96 Police made a different psychological profile, stating that they were looking for “a man with homosexual preferences, victim of childhood physical abuse, lived surrounded by women, he could have had a grandmother or lived with an elderly person, has resentment towards that feminine figure, and posses great intelligence.” 97 The physical profile differs greatly from the psychological one. In the physical profile police stated they were looking for a man dressed as a woman or a robust

93 Lamas, "De Trasvestis Y Aseinos En Serie."
96 Fernández, "Es ‘Mataviejitas’ Brillante.- Bátiz."
woman, whereas in the psychological profile police search for a man with homosexual tendencies. This may be because as Bernardo Bátiz, Chief of Mexico City’s Department of Justice stated, “There is no certainty” relating to the sex of the serial killer, as opposed to his “behavioural traits” where police have “many elements” to determine with certainty the psychological profile. The fact that police had more certainty concerning the psychological profile than the physical one (where there were numerous witness accounts) leads to the conclusion that police authorities aligned the figure of El/La Mataviejitas with international accounts of serial killers (The Monstre de Montmartre, for instance, as I will shortly discuss).

Despite Mexico’s modernization and political and social changes, acceptance of homosexuality is what Claudia Schaefer calls a “national illusion;” that is, Mexico refuses to recognize homosexual communities as part of Mexico’s creation of a national identity. In this sense, homosexuals, like serial killers, fall outside Mexican national identity, as both figures are outside the norms of mexicanidad – that is, what characteristics constitute an ideal Mexican (mestizo and macho).

A Mexican novel written in 1989 by Luis Zapata entitled: La hermana de Angelia Maria narrates the life of Alvaro, who transforms himself into a transvestite called Alba, who after suffering constant police harassment for being a homosexual transvestite becomes a serial killer. The literary character of the transvestite serial killer preceded the transvestite Mataviejitas for whom police were searching. In the hyper-reality of Mexico City where police based their knowledge of serial killers on international descriptions of serial killing, it seems, that just like Baudrillard’s simulacra, there is no distinction between the imagined literary character and the real transvestite Mataviejitas imagined by police.

On the other hand, the profile of the “Monster of Montmartre” might have also influenced police to search for a man with homosexual tendencies, probably a

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
transvestite. In 1987 Thierry Paulin was arrested and convicted of the killing of over twenty elderly women. Paulin was a young, gay, HIV-positive unemployed transvestite from Martinique whose otherness in France was inextricably linked to his crimes. According to Deborah Reisinger, Paulin was portrayed in French media “not as a troubled youth, a characteristic common to serial killers, but as a homosexual from Martinique, as if these adjectives might explain Paulin’s crimes.” According to the Mexican newspaper Reforma, the specialists of the National Institute of Penal Sciences who collaborated with the Department of Justice of Mexico City, analyzed European serial killers, from Spain and France, in order to help in the search for El Mataviejitas.

These specialists stated that Paulin “dressed as a woman” to kill elderly women, had “homosexual preferences” and in his childhood lived with his grandmother, who physically abused him as a child. This description was then applied to El/La Mataviejitas, first since it was believed that both El Mataviejitas and “the Monstre de Montmartre,” killed elderly women, and second, it was applied because police couldn’t conceptualize a female serial killer. And finally, the application was justified because, in a homophobic culture like Mexico, transvestites are already criminalized.

The search for a man dressed in women’s clothes who had homosexual tendencies led police to conclude that El Mataviejitas, like the “Monstre of Montmartre,” and like Alba from Zapata’s novel, must be a transvestite. Cultural prejudice, ignorance, discrimination and homophobia consequently led to the detention of male sex-workers. Since investigators had established that El Mataviejitas’ pattern involved the use of “grand physical force” and against witness accounts of a “tall, 1.70m, robust woman with black hair,” or descriptions such as, “I believe it was a woman, I am not sure because [she] was very tall. But she was blond and short haired. [She] used glasses and had a bag” and

100 Chapter 3 offers a more broad exploration of the notion of mexicanidad
101 Reisinger, "Murder and Banality in the Contemporary Fait Divers," 83.
102 Ibid.: 90.
104 Jiménez, "Juana Barraza: Analfabeta, Su Madre La Regaló a Los 12 Años, Fue Violada Y Le Mataron Un Hijo a Batazos."
“using a thick layer of makeup,” police concluded that only a transvestite was capable of such physical strength as necessary to kill an elderly woman and at the same time use make-up. In the face of witness accounts of a “man or robust woman with very manly characteristics that possibly used a wig,” police decided El Mataviejitas must be a transvestite. The continuous “absent presence” of men in official accounts of serial killing and cultural homophobia severely affected the profiling El/La Mataviejitas.

The chief of the department of justice of Mexico City was certain that the Mataviejitas was a “man dressed as a woman.” Under this assumption, in October 2005, Mexican police drove through streets of Mexico City known for their transvestite sex-workers, and detained at least 38 male sex-workers, most of them homosexual, in order to take their fingerprints and photographs. They were taken into police stations under no charge and were given a fine of 1,200 pesos for prostitution. They concluded that none of the captured transvestites were El/La Mataviejitas, and Bátiz assured the public that “it might not be a transvestite but we are certain it is a transgender.”

When the photographs and fingerprints of the detained transvestites proved to police that none of the transvestites arrested were El/La Mataviejitas, Bátiz’s persistant belief that El/La Mataviejitas must be someone who fell outside the norms of mexicanidad - a transgendered person, for example exposes a dominant homophobic culture where non-normatively gendered and sexed bodies are already read as criminal. Moreover, the police equated homosexuality with sexual failure, which is commonly correlated with serial killing. There are many popular culture accounts such as the internationally successful The Silence of the Lambs, in which sexual failure or sexual compulsion (cannibalism, for instance) are linked to serial killers as constituting a type of person. The serial killer then becomes an attractive/repulsive figure.

105 Ibid.
107 Miguel, “Ningún Trasvesti Resultó Ser El Mataviejitas: Bátiz.”
108 Lamas, “De Trasvestis Y Asesinos En Serie.”
109 Miguel, “Ningún Trasvesti Resultó Ser El Mataviejitas: Bátiz.”
110 For more see Caleb Crain, "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels," American Literature 66, no. 1 (1994), Christopher Gittings, ""Zero Patience", Genre, Difference,
Caroline Picart in “The Compulsion of Real/Reel Serial Killers and Vampires: Toward a Gothic Criminology” further explores the striking similarities between the figure of the serial killer and the mythic figure of the vampire, both represented as superhuman charismatic predators who kill out of compulsion, mostly sexual. Similarly Seltzer has also signalled that the identity of the serial killer is commonly intertwined with that of a sex-criminal.

There is no evidence of sexual violence in police and media narratives of El/La Mataviejitas – even if one can argue for a Foucaultian power relation with the victims as potentially sexual. That is, if one were to argue that El/La Mataviejitas killed for the pleasure of killing, because El/La Mataviejitas had the “power” to do it (as it was a robust strong person murdering weak defenseless elderly women), the power in itself could be read as pleasure, and all power could potentially be sexual. However, I would rather argue that the profiling of El/La Mataviejitas as a homosexual, which is equated with sexual failure, follows the international assumption of a serial killer (as a sex-criminal) whose kind of acts are represented as a “species of person.”

Martha Lamas, an anthropologist in the Gender Studies Program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), published an article in the political magazine Proceso in defense of the arrested transvestites. She differentiates between kinds of transvestites in order to demystify the idea that all transvestites are homosexuals. According to Marta Lamas, transvestism is a “condition, independently of the sexual orientation … something similar to fetishism.” She further states that “most transvestites are heterosexuals and don’t want to change their sex.” In her intent to defend transvestites, she argues that not all transvestites are homosexuals, but fails to demystify the idea that serial killing equals compulsion. She states that “serial killing is a psychopathological conduct that implies an organized mind and great intelligence. These

111 Seltzer, Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture, 4.
112 Lamas, "De Trasvestis Y Asesinos En Serie."
are not crimes of passion or moments of craziness but they are methodically planned, giving much pleasure to the executors… the ‘relief’ they feel after the crime only lasts a certain time and then they need to kill again.” Marta Lamas further merges what Caroline Picart notes as the figure of the vampire and that of the serial killer, who kill out of compulsion.

This particular codification of masculinity that circulates in popular culture and within criminological narratives, where the “absent presence” of men in serial killing is taken for granted, problematically masculinises criminality. When these narratives are directly imported to Mexico City in the search for El/La Mataviejitas, profiling becomes not a preventive tool to arrest the responsible agent but a prejudicial means that has further helped to marginalized non-normative genders and sexualities in Mexico.

113 Ibid.
The Look of a Serial Killer: *La Mataviejitas*

One of the most prominent tools used in the search for *El/la Mataviejitas* was the creation of sketches. More than 64 sketches were produced and distributed in the municipalities where *El/la Mataviejitas* was believed to attack. Moreover, the sketches were displayed on every police patrol, delegation and public transportation. The sketches were essential in the police plan to capture *El/la Mataviejitas*. Police designed the sketches of *El Mataviejitas* as a tool for identification of the serial killer following the tradition of criminal photographs, which were designed “quite literally to facilitate the arrest of their referent.”

I believe that a sketch potentially serves as a reassurance to the victim, survivor, and witnesses, and in this case to the public, that authorities have the necessary knowledge and experience in order to find the one responsible for the crime. However, as I will argue in this chapter, the use of sketches is questionable and prejudicial as it continues the long tradition of marginalization of lower classes established during the nineteenth century with the use of photography for criminal identification.

This chapter focuses on the visuals police authorities and criminologists used to identify *El/la Mataviejitas*, as well as the texts that accompanied them. The first section questions the objectivity of the sketches of *El/la Mataviejitas*, paying particular attention to the sex and gender tensions between the sketches and the police and media accounts. The visuals I make reference to were those published in newspapers and distributed all around Mexico City, as well as two other sketches that were made available to me by Comandante Victor Hugo Moneda from the Department of Justice of Mexico City.

The second section of this chapter asks whether the sketches portray more a “prototype” of a criminal than a portrait of *El/la Mataviejitas*. To take up this question, I look closely at the chronology of narratives that followed the sketches when transvestites were

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arrested as the possible Mataviejitas. The third section problematizes the assumption that criminality is innate and thus visible through physical traits captured by photographs and sketches, specifically in Mexico. The fourth section pays particular attention to the shift in gendered and sexed constructions around the Mataviejitas among criminologists, police authorities and news media when a woman was arrested, and how the sketches were then interpreted and re-presented. In this section I particularly focus on a three-dimensional sketch police released of the Mataviejitas (which was presented in a press conference, then stayed in police offices and now is exhibited in the Police Cultural Center in Mexico City), as it was used as “evidence” that Juana Barraza was indeed La Mataviejitas.

The last section examines a set of photographs published by criminologist and police collaborator Martín Barrón, in his book *El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas* (2006) where Juana Barraza’s “looks,” are used as evidence that, indeed, Barraza is La Mataviejitas. As stated in the introduction, the argument of this chapter is not concerned with the culpability of Juana Barraza but with the representation and approaches used by media and police authorities to conceptualize a female serial killer.

**Interpreting Sketches**

In the search for “*El Mataviejitas*,” police created 64 sketches of the possible serial killer based on witness accounts of the last person seen with the victims.¹¹⁵ The first sketch was released in December 2003, a month after police first mentioned the possibility of a serial killer with an specific modus operandi, that is: “the (male) homicidal dressed as a (female) nurse” pretending to be a worker of the Mexico City’s government program dedicated to economically assisting elderly citizens.¹¹⁶ However, it wasn’t until a year

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¹¹⁵ Brito and Corona, "Atrapan a Mataviejitas, Lleva Lista De Ancianas." Sierra and Fernández, "Tienen 64 Rostros Del 'Mataviejitas'."

¹¹⁶ Brito and Corona, "Atrapan a Mataviejitas, Lleva Lista De Ancianas."
and a half later that police started a rigorous search for the Mataviejitas by creating two other sketches (Fig. 2) on August 25, 2005, and distributing them all over the city.

Although composites of possible criminals and photographs of criminals are different in their use for criminal identification purposes, they way they both are interpreted is basically the same. That is, composites and photographs seek to portray the specific features of criminals. Moreover, composites and photographs are perceived and talked about as objective and neutral by criminologists and police. The black and white sketches follow the photographic tradition of criminal representation. That is, since its origins in the nineteenth century, photography has been used as a forensic aid and scientific tool to present as ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ the ‘facts’ of crime scenes and criminals. Scientific photography promised objective documentation in the field of social sciences as “the image is intended to function as a kind of evidence, an irrefutable testimony to the existence of facts.” However, as Sandra Phillips points out, “facts are not neutral” and they come embedded with the “cultural burden of meaning.”

The two composites of El/La Mataviejitas were presented in August 2005, in order to show the facial features of the Mataviejitas made after eyewitness accounts. The two composites are side by side under the banner “Se Buscan” (Wanted). Under the sketches there is a sign that reads “Ayúdanos a prevenir” (Help us to prevent!) If you have seen them (masculine plural in Spanish) call us. They are related to the homicides of elderly woman. The poster also has a list of the emergency judicial police phone numbers. Although the poster does not specify if the sketches represent a man or a woman, the police declarations and the media narrations accompanying these sketches conclude that El Mataviejitas is a man.

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120 Phillips, "Identifying the Criminal," 11.
121 Sketches obtained from a personal interview with Comandante Moneda en la Policia Judicial del Distrito Federal
The news reports that accompanied the sketches referred to a male serial killer who was believed to be responsible for at least four homicides of elderly women, and quoted the chief of Mexico City’s Department of Justice, Bernardo Bátiz, stating that the sketches were based on the testimony of eyewitnesses who had “directly seen the (male) serial killer.”

Paying close attention to the sketches (which are either portraying a woman or a feminized man) and the news and media narration that follows them (which referred to a male serial killer), one finds a contradiction concerning the sex and gender of the Mataviejitas portrayed on the sketches and the police and media reports. This is important because it points to the questionable usefulness of the sketches identifying El/La Mataviejitas, their “neutral” and objective portrait of the serial killer, and the actual knowledge or biases police had in their search for the serial killer. The sketches, rather than being a scientific tool to help detain the serial killer, seem to be based on assumptions of what the serial killer should look like; that is, a man.

The two sketches presented in 2005 side by side do not seem to resemble each other; the sketch on the right resembles a woman, with shorter hair and some bangs, while the sketch on the left could be a man. Moreover, the features of the two sketches are very different and it is not clear if they are portraying one or two different Mataviejitas. On the other hand, the sketches (Fig. 3) provided by Comandante Moneda are from a manual that was produced while the French police were in Mexico instructing Mexican police on serial killing, they seem to portray a woman who doesn’t resemble any of the other sketches.

Composite sketches are created with computer software which allows witnesses to select from a repertoire of eyes, ears, mouths, chins, hair, and so on, to create an image that ideally encompasses all of the features of the perpetrator. However, as has been pointed out by several studies in the United States, “facial composite systems produce a poor

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likeness of the intended target face.” A lot of this is because witnesses see the face as a whole instead of specific features. However, even if computer software allowed witnesses to describe the face as a whole instead of focusing on specific features, research suggests this approach equally fails to produce a portrait of a specific face.

There are many factors that influence the accuracy of a composite sketch, for example the capacity of a witness to communicate the likeness of the suspect. Composite photographs could produce an approximation of a suspect but not the “objective” and absolute features that the serial killer has. What is important for me to highlight here is not whether composite software functions or not but that “composite faces result in an increase similarity” to an ‘average’ individual.

Two months after the distribution of the sketches all over the city, at the beginning of October a total of 46 people had been taken to police stations because of their resemblance to *El Mataviejitas*. Police photographed them and took their fingerprints but concluded that none of them were the serial killer. Moreover, police had done more than 300 interviews with different people who had been reported by citizens because of their resemblance to the sketches. Even more, some journalistic reports claimed that more than 500 people had been detained as possibly being the Mataviejitas. The resemblance of the sketches to so many people questions the “neutrality” and “objectivity” of the sketches because they resemble a more “average” individual. Narratives on serial killing, as Seltzer points out, commonly refer to serial killers as a common citizen, that is, someone who looks “just like you or me.”

Furthermore, considering police and news reports assumptions of the male nature of the Mataviejitas which contradicted witness accounts of a woman, I find it important to

125 Hasel E. Lisa, "Catching the Bad Guy: Morphing Composite Faces Helps."
127 Ibid.
highlight that most newspaper reports and police declarations did not specify the sex and
gender of the detainees and limited their reporting to the masculine plural. They might
well have been thinking of a woman serial killer since in the Spanish language, the plural
is always masculine and it presumably includes both men and women. However, when
referring to the serial killer, Mataviejitas, police and media always referred to and talked
about an El (he). Only one report, in the newspaper Crónica, stated that both men and
women had been detained and interrogated because of their resemblance to the sketches.

Photography and composite sketches have made the body readable as a text. The readable
content, in this case, is the associations made between the composite of El Mataviejitas
and the codified characteristics of the serial killer, which despite witness accounts of the
individual resembling and dressing like a woman, is constantly talked about as middle-
aged man, following the sexed and gendered stereotyping of serial killers. The serial
killer was believed to be a man, and the narration that accompanied the sketch
characterizes about him as “astute,” of “brilliant intelligence,” and “cautious”, who acts
alone and is smart enough to know not to leave fingerprints.129

What is problematic about the sketch of El Mataviejitas is that on one hand, it is
presented following the photographic belief that the sketch is “neutral,” carrying the
supposedly transparent ‘truth’ of what a serial killer looks like: while, a close analysis of
the narrations accompanying the sketches reveal that these are not neutral, as the sketches
are portraying more what a serial killer should be (a man) than what he/she might look
like (a woman according to witness accounts). And on the other hand, composite
photographs of El Mataviejitas do not show the specific features of the serial killer but
instead resemble at least other five hundred people.

129 Leticia Fernández, "Es 'Mataviejitas' Brillante: Batiz," Reforma, 11 October 2005
The prototype of *El/La Mataviejitas*

The sketches portrayed a woman or a feminized man. However, they were accompanied by assumptions based on international accounts of serial killing. A week after the release of the sketches, journalistic reports in the newspaper *Reforma* declared that the General Justice Department of Mexico City had given a detailed account of the psychological profile of the Mataviejitas: a middle age homosexual male who was abused during childhood and lived surrounded by women.\(^{130}\) According to police, “other serial killers of elderly women have been sexually abused during childhood and hated geriatric women.” Police made reference to Paulin Thierry, the “Monstre de Montmartre.”\(^{131}\) The psychological profile of the Mataviejitas has more similarities with a “prototype” of a serial killer than with information provided by the police investigation into the Mataviejitas.

At the end of October, two weeks after Chief police Báñez stated that “judicial authorities have determined that the (male) serial killer is 1.70 mts., robust and dresses as a woman, although the sex of the offender hasn’t been determined,” 38 to 50 (depending on the source)\(^ {132}\), transvestites, transgender and/or transsexual male sex-workers were arrested, taken into custody, photographed, and their fingerprints taken in order match the fingerprints with those left by the serial killer of elderly women. I believe that when Báñez referred to the profile of the Mataviejitas as that of a “male serial killer whose sex has not been determined” he is basically confused about the difference between sex and gender and what he is trying to say is that the “sexual orientation” of the serial killer had not been determined. Determining the sexual orientation of the Mataviejitas is important because the profile of the serial killer seems to be more influenced by Thierry Paulin, who was homosexual and accused of killing elderly women in France, than by witness accounts.


\(^{131}\) Ibid.

After none of the fingerprints matched, Bátiz declared that detaining transvestites wasn’t a discriminatory practice but part of the investigation. He further stated that “the serial killer might not be a transvestite but we are sure he is a transgender.”¹³³ On one hand, the impossibility of conceiving of a woman serial killer seemed prevalent, which reveals a sexed and gendered construction of criminality, and on the other hand it perpetuated the nineteenth century belief that criminality is more likely to occur in lower class, poor, deviant (i.e. non-normative) subjects.

Why didn’t police look for homosexual men in gay bars in Condesa and Polanco, upper- or upper-middle-class neighbourhoods in Mexico City? Based on personal experience, I argue it is because class defines gender transgression in Mexico City. In the middle and upper classes, gay and lesbians bars rarely do transgress their genders. That is, in middle and upper class gay bars in Mexico City, the clientele is either “masculine” gay males or “feminine” lesbians; there are no transgressions in the genders they occupy. On the other hand, gender in working class bars in Mexico City is more often transgressed; there are much more “effeminate,” “feminine” and “masculine” gay males and much more “masculine,” “butch” and “feminine” machas or lesbians. In a conservative, traditional and catholic culture any sexed and gendered transgression by working and lower classes only contributes to an already perceived deviance.

According to Allan Sekula, photography “came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define… the contingent insistence of deviance and social pathology.”¹³⁴ The “other” Sekula talks about is the criminal who has been traditionally photographed for identification and classification (i.e. the poor, women, and the deviant), and whose otherness separates the normal from the abnormally normal. The other and the abnormally normal are in Mexico the serial killer and the non-normative genders and sexualities. Transvestites and transgender working-class subjects are consistently othered and criminalized since their sexuality is perceived as deviant. The sketches were used as

a “prototype” of a criminal instead of a possible portrait of *El Mataviejitas*. Police were searching for a “prototype” criminal who in Mexico is clearly not a middle class (gay) individual but a lower/working class non-normative-gendered individual.

**The visible innate criminal**

The sketches of *El Mataviejitas* expose the nineteenth century criminological assumption that photography helps to “identify criminals because, it was believed, he or she looked like one.”

The sciences of physiognomy and phrenology shared the belief that “the surface of the body, especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character.”

Mexican police created the sketches based on a computer program called CaraMex where different phenotypes of criminals have been added. As Bátiz pointed out in a press conference “the phenotypes correspond to indigenous and lower-class Mexicans, most of them men.”

Using photographs of previously incarcerated offenders as prototypes of criminals to compose the face of another possible offender assumes that criminality is innate and thus visible in physical traits. In this section I will show how this belief is problematic especially in Mexico where it serves to marginalize mostly mestizo lower-class citizens.

After Mexico’s independence from Spain (1810), during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), modernity meant progress. Order and progress were the catchwords of the project of modernization towards the end of the nineteenth century in Mexico. Criminology emerged as a science representing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the order and progress were necessary for the modernization of society. The process of political stabilization during the Porfiriato made possible “material advances but at the same time incremented the social inequalities,” in the country as a whole but

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135 Phillips, "Identifying the Criminal," 11.
especially in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{139} Elites saw popular classes, who had been migrating from the provinces to the city, as “potentially delinquents,” and this perception led to a politic of control.\textsuperscript{140} Mexican criminology, as Robert Buffington explains in his book \textit{Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico}, were laid during the Porfiriato, reflecting “elites’ anxieties about lower-class criminality. These anxieties, an unacknowledged subtext in officially sanctioned classic criminology, would become a recognized element of mainstream criminological discourse.”\textsuperscript{141} This criminological discourse, as analyzed in this chapter, left a legacy that points to a classist, racist and sexist approach to criminality evident in the police use of sketches on their search for \textit{El/La Mataviejitas}.

During the late eighteen century, Mexican criminologists like Martínez and Vergara developed a “scientific methodology” to find the characteristics of the Mexican criminal. Martínez and Vergara measured the skull of deceased criminals, took photographic images of one hundred inmates and prepared biographical data arranged by crime in order to then compare it with European data in order to establish the physiology of criminals.\textsuperscript{142} Just like Mexico’s first “scientific” criminologist Rafael de Zayas, Martínez and Vergara concluded that the “ferocious and shocking aspect that most criminals exhibit, whose evil passions are reflected in their visages… is what distinguishes the delinquent man from the honorable man.”\textsuperscript{143} It was believed that offenders were a different kind of people whose criminality was innate and reflected in their faces. Photographs of criminals were classified according to the type of crimes and it was believed for example that the “lips of rapist were ‘thick and arched’ while the lips of robbers were ‘plegados’ (puckered) and those of murderers, ‘thin.’”\textsuperscript{144} This classification served to delimit the characteristics of the criminal Mexican and the modern Mexican (who ideally should look more “Spanish” – that is to say, white).

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Robert M. Buffington, \textit{Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 35.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{143} Martínez y Vergara, \textit{Estudios de antropología criminal}, 97 quoted in Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
Martinez and Vergara followed Francis Galton, who in 1883, introduced the term “eugenics” “to define the study of the hereditary differences of mental, moral, and physical traits amongst individuals, classes and races, and the measurements of social control which could be taken to ensure the general improvement of the species,”¹⁴⁵ which he used in conjunction with his method of composite photography in order “to predict the hereditary physiological and psychological characteristics of certain types of crimes.”¹⁴⁶ Like Galton, Mexican criminologists classified only lower class offenders dissolving the “boundary between the criminal and the working-class poor,”¹⁴⁷ consequently following racist and colonialist prejudices since lower classes in Mexico were commonly indigenous and mestizo. After Independence, elites, in their efforts to make Mexicans modern and European, were concerned with racial mixture, and criminology provided an “objective” language that justified colonialism and racism.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, one of the most prominent criminologists in Mexico during the twentieth century was Carlos Roumagnac, who wrote, in 1904, *Los criminales en Mexico* (Criminals in Mexico). Roumagnac developed a typology of the Mexican criminal through photographs and extensive interviews of both incarcerated men and women, basing his “scientific” methodology on the work of prominent foreign criminologists. Roumagnac’s typology system was based on heredity, environment or circumstance.¹⁴⁹ Roumagnac’s typologies range from classifying criminal faces as “ugly” or “attractive,” “sad,” “happy,” “good,” or “bad” – physical attributes that were combined with personal background, race and class.¹⁵⁰ The belief that criminality is visible through physical features marginalized mostly mestizo and lower class people in Mexico. This belief, I argue, has persisted since the last century. The composite sketches, which use a software program where taxonomies and phenotypes are taken from lower-class mestizos, mostly male, reveal assumptions about class, gender, sex and ethnicity that have characterized Mexican criminology since the nineteenth century.

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¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 12.
¹⁴⁸ Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico*.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 59.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 60.
Furthermore, in spite of the sketches being in black and white, the features represented correspond to a racialized Mexican, who normally is a lower-class criminal. They do so because the features on the composite sketches are based in indigenous, mestizo, lower-class Mexicans (according to Bernardo Bátiz). The sketch doesn’t portray somebody with more “European” features, that is to say those which normally corresponds to upper-middle-class Mexicans. The sketch is not portraying an upper- or middle-class individual; on the contrary, the sketch is reinforcing the idea that criminality is biologically determined and thus identifiable in certain physical traits, without acknowledging that this recognition is permeated by cultural understandings and historical fears of whom a criminal is and what he/she looks. The sketch makes visible a racist, classist and sexist ‘scientific’ approach to criminality prevalent in Mexico since the nineteenth century.

**From *El Mataviejitas* as “brilliant” to *La Mataviejitas* as “pathological”**

On the afternoon of January 25, 2006, in a working class neighborhood in Mexico City, a renter was coming home when he saw his 89-year-old landlady’s door open. He came into the door to say hello when he saw his landlady, Ana Maria de los Reyes Alfaro, strangled on the floor. He also saw a woman fleeing the crime scene. He then came out of the house and started shouting: “police, police.” Two police officers who were doing the rounds on their patrol heard him; one of them immediately got out of the car in order to chase the woman who was running against the traffic. After approximately 10 metres police captured the fugitive. The woman running from the police, who was carrying two plastic bags that according to news reports had a stethoscope and a list of beneficiaries of the government program *Si Vale*, was Juana Barraza Samperio. Immediately the two police officers called their boss and said: “We captured *La Mataviejitas,*” to which the boss replied “Really?” Within minutes, media, the chief of police of the Department of

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152 Ibid.
Justice, and all relevant officials were on the crime scene. The next day’s news read: “Mataviejitas falls after committing another crime: it is a woman.”

Police officers stated that when they detained Juana Barraza they “knew right away” that she was the El Mataviejitas they were searching for (despite the fact they were searching for a man). According to the police officers who arrested Barraza, “the sketches were very similar [to Barraza] and when more police officers showed up at the crime scene they stated the same.” Never mind that more than 500 people have been brought to police stations as possible Mataviejitas because of their resemblance to the sketches. Or that Barraza herself had been to the police station to surrender but “nobody recognized her” and she went back home. Before Barraza was called La Mataviejitas, nobody recognized her “similarities” with those of the sketch. I argue that rather than being an objective statement of the defining features of El/La Mataviejitas, the sketches are instead interpretative materials used by both the police and the public who “needed” to find the Mataviejitas.

The composite sketch talked about in the press, and which police used to demonstrate that Barraza was indeed the Mataviejitas, was created in November 2005 by Patricia Payan, from the Department of Justice of Mexico City (Fig. 4). The three-dimensional bust is made of plastilina (play dough or modelling dough) and now is permanently featured in the Centro Cultural Policial (Cultural Police Center) in Mexico City. The three-dimensional bust was created following the same principle as the composite software. With the information from all the sketches, Payan manually created a three-dimensional composite of play dough. The bust does seem to resemble a woman; however, before the arrest of Juana Barraza, there was no news or media report that mentioned the sex and gender of this three-dimensional composite. The news narration around this sketch comes after Barraza is arrested and serves more as a reassurance that police had actual knowledge of who they were looking for. There is constant reference to

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155 Herrera, "Hampones Comunes Copian El Estilo Del Mataviejitas."
156 Carlos Jiménez, "Mataviejitas Fue a Pgjdf a Entregarse Y No La Atendieron," Crónica, February 08 2006.
the similarities between the three-dimensional sketch and Juana Barraza herself, especially pointing to the fact that “both the sketch and Juana were wearing a red-coloured sweater,”¹⁵⁷ which was read as a “sign of aggressiveness” or that “the corpulent complexion, the dyed hair and the height of Barraza coincide totally with the three-dimensional sketch of the Mataviejitas.”¹⁵⁸ Since the three-dimensional composite is just a face, I wonder how “the corpulent complexion and the height” could coincide with the sketch.

Whereas Barraza has no glasses and short hair, Payan’s figure wears glasses and has a hair bandana (according to Payan this bandana shows potentially different hair styles and colors) and long hair. A photo of the bust published in El nudo del silencio, the book by criminologist and police collaborator Martín Barrón, and the actual bust in the Centro Cultural Policial, shows the three-dimensional sketch with no glasses, while photos in the newspaper after Barraza’s arrest portray the bust with glasses and a hair bandana, accessories that never get mentioned. Whether the three-dimensional sketch resembles Barraza or not is important only because, as mentioned earlier, sketches could potentially resemble many different people, but they are nonetheless used as evidence to criminalize Barraza as the only Mataviejitas.

What is important to highlight is that this sketch is the one that potentially more closely resembles a woman. However, it is not talked about until after Barraza’s arrest and as a confirmation that she is La Mataviejitas, without any mention that police and media were actually looking for a man and then a transvestite. I believe that the circumstances of Barraza’s detention and the manner in which the sketches have been presented have permeated the interpretation of the viewer and the producer, leaving “scientific” knowledge susceptible to subjective observations. The knowledge in Mexico of El Mataviejitas was based on a stereotype of who the serial killer should be (a middle age man—sometimes characterized as homosexual) rather than on actual information and police investigation of the individual responsible for the homicides of elderly woman.

¹⁵⁷ Agustín Salgado and Mirna Servín, “Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer,” La Jornada, January 26 2006.
The sketches alone, contrary to what police have pointed out, are not the sole evidence that Barraza is actually the Mataviejitas.

As soon as Juana Barraza was declared La Mataviejitas (with the Spanish she being substituted for he), the narrative of a serial killer changed dramatically. Police descriptions of her character went from “brilliant and astute” to “pathological,” replicating international constructions around female serial killing. Contrary to the description of male serial killers as brilliant who “possess traits that are desirable even if these skills are used for evil… incarcerated violent women are seen as strange, alien creatures, and often, as being beyond redemption.” Feminist approaches to criminology have pointed out the impossibility of imagining violent women, who can only be represented as “bad or mad.” In the words of Helen Birch, “The idea that women are capable of extreme violence is anathema to most of us. Meanwhile, in courtrooms and newspapers throughout the Western world, women who kill are divided into two camps: bad – wicked or inhuman; or mad – not like ‘ordinary’ women. The extreme defines the norm.” Many feminist criminologists have pointed out that “our reluctance to criminalize women betrays our fears of the falling apart of our social fabric.”

Moreover, it has been pointed out that “violent women are seen neither as sane nor as women. Society needs to see violent women as different – either as mad or bad – because otherwise, we would need new discourses to understand that both men and women can be violent.” Consequently violent women are constantly seen as different from other women, a difference characterized by their pathology.

Representations of Juana Barraza in the media, and in police and criminological reports, are aligned with international discourses. As in the Aileen Wournous case in the United States, Barraza has been portrayed by the media “in line with the gendered (and raced and classed) dimensions of being a female criminal.” That is, female murderesses

158 Ibid.
160 Birch, "Introduction," 5.
161 Gilbert, "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes," 1282.
163 Picart, "Crime and the Gothic: Sexualizing Serial Killers ".

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challenge the norms of femininity and the only ways they are talked about are in terms of their maleness or masculine appearance. Media and official accounts in Mexico have been no exception and their portrayal of Barraza as “robust, strong, and of abrupt ways and decisive voice,” “corpulent” and with “manly features” align Barraza with international accounts of female violence as a masculine trait. Although Juana Barraza’s sexual orientation hasn’t been the object of media and police scrutiny, her non-normative female body has served as justification for aligning Barraza with representations of violent women as mannish, which correlates heavily with “lesbian.” Culturally, in both Mexico and the United States, “male aggression” is equated with machismo or “imposing control over others,” which is viewed as a simple male trait; while “female aggression” is equated with “failure of self-control” producing a “double standard” prevalent in official discourses of female violence. Most importantly, “female aggression is seen as unnatural and therefore pathological…aggression is a primary marker of masculine/feminine difference.”

Media representations of Barraza as a violent woman make common reference to a “psychological profile” that defines her as “aggressive.” This aggression, according to police, is what drove her to commit the multiple murders: Juana kills out of coraje (rage), or “Barraza killed because she held resentment towards her mother,” thus aligning her with the psychological profile of El Mataviejitas.

As soon as Barraza became La Mataviejitas, police, criminologists and media found much “evidence” of her “aggressiveness” and the rage that must have driven her to kill

164 Gilbert, "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes," 1283.
165 Agustin Salgado and Mirna Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer," La Jornada, January 26 2006.
166 Agustin Salgado and Mirna Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer."
170 Claudia Bolaños, Óscar Herrera, and Ángeles Velazco, "Las Maté Por Rencor Y Rabia,' Reforma, January 26 2006.
elderly women. Patricia Payan linked the homicide of the 89-year-old woman with Barraza’s menstrual cycle, the full moon, and the red sweater she was wearing, as proof of Barraza’s “aggressiveness.”\textsuperscript{171} Payan registered previous homicides (though she doesn’t specify which ones of the 49 cases) with the full moon, since according to Payan, “it produces behavioral changes […] in humans.” Barraza’s current menstrual cycle the day of her arrest was used as a “scientific” hormonal fact to prove that she was especially “aggressive,” as Barraza was influenced by the full moon, which led her to strangle Alfaro, and consequently reveal her pathology. The association of menstrual cycles and the full moon with aggressiveness that leads to serial killing has persisted since the nineteenth century, when women were seen “as predators and vampires who could destroy both men and civilization.”\textsuperscript{172}

Another sign of her aggressiveness, according to news reports and criminologists, is that Juana Barraza “liked [to wear] red and preferred Tuesday and Wednesdays to kill.”\textsuperscript{173} Moreover, the police found an amulet to the Santa Muerte (holy death) in her bag and when police officers search her house they found “an altar to the Holy Death, with a snake and an apple as offerings”\textsuperscript{174} and another altar to “Jesus Malverde, the saint of drug dealers.”\textsuperscript{175} The cultural assumption of Barraza’s adoration of the Holy Death represented for media discourses a testament to her perverse personality -- as only dangerous people adore the “Holy Death” in Mexico – locates Barraza as a dangerous working-class individual.

Media depictions of Barraza as outside the traditional constructions of femininity are further characterized and “scientifically” validated as pathological by criminologists and neuropsychologists. Feggy Ostrosky, a neuropsychologist who “scientifically examined” Barraza’s brain and personality directly after her arrest, stated that Juana Barraza “shares

\textsuperscript{171} Martín Gabriel Barrón Cruz, \textit{El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas} (Ciudad de México: Editorial Océano de México, 2006), 35.
\textsuperscript{172} Gilbert, "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes," 1284.
\textsuperscript{173} Salgado and Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer."
\textsuperscript{174} Carlos Jiménez, \textit{La Mataviejitas Coleccionaba Recortes De Periodicos Con Las Historias De Sus Homicidios}, \textit{Crónica}, January 30 2006.
\textsuperscript{175} Agustín Salgado, Angel Bolaños, and Rene Ramón, "Tras Las Rejas, La Mataviejitas; El Lunes Se Define Su Situación Legal," \textit{La Jornada}, January 28 2006.
with many serial killers psychopathic tendencies that could have been avoided if she had had a better life.”

According to Ostrosky, Barraza’s mental illness is evidenced by the results of the psychological exams, where she “showed very little sensorial reaction to violent, loving, calm or neutral images …the measure of her cerebral waves reflected very little sensitivity before the seriousness of the images she was confronted with. We showed her a chair, which for most people doesn’t represent any sensation; however she told us she felt something agreeable when she saw the chair, because she could rest in that chair, and when she observed an image of a woman, she said she felt nothing.”

The electroencefalograma exams were complemented with a “neuropsychological exam.” Ostrosky was able to deduce that Barraza “presents an alteration, not very severe, in the levels of her frontal lobes” which explains why is hard for her to “inhibit and sequence stimulus.”

I am frankly not exactly sure what this means and it is not explained further. However, criminologist Barrón took the opportunity to explain these exams and further corroborated Ostrosky’s findings with “the reflexions of Adrian Raine,” a British psychologist specializing in neurobiological and biosocial causes of violent behavior, who stated that “frontal and temporal lobes of violent aggressors present some structural and functional deficiencies.” That is to say, “the prefrontal region of killers presents a very low activity.” In other words, “the majority of killers’ brains function in a different way from the brains of a normal person.” Barraza’s physiognomy is evidence that she is a pathological serial killer as defined by her biological features. The “scientific” explanation of Barraza’s cerebral waves and physiognomy is problematic, to say the least. Firstly, it presumes that an individual posses certain “inner characteristics” and “physiognomy” that reveal her criminality. Secondly, it is problematic that both Barrón and Ostrosky have a capacity for “objectively” interpreting Barraza’s “feelings, emotions, behavior” revealing the “truth”; even thought both “scientists” talked about

177 Ibid.
178 Barrón Cruz, El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas, 102.
180 Ibid., 103.
181 Ibid., 104.
their interviews with Barraza “through their personal narratives of travelling to the heart of darkness” in what Seltzer describes as the “language of shamanism rather than psychology.”¹⁸² And finally, it simplistically pathologizes Barraza because of her physiognomy, reducing her to a “species of person.”

Since the nineteenth century violent women have been correlated with aggression as a masculine trait, thus a sign of criminality has been prevalent. However, these discourses have been challenged by numerous feminist criminologists. For instance, Jack (2001) describes aggression, in relation to Darwin and Freud, as “the bedrock upon which gender dualism is erected. Women’s aggression arouses inchoate fears of an unnatural blurring of gender lines that have been drawn by evolution.”¹⁸³ Men could be aggressive but aggressive women fall outside the norms of femininity. Jack has also pointed the “ethnic, racial and class stereotypes that intersect with the “myth that women are not aggressive.” Socially marginalized poor, working-class women are often punished and caricatured for their more overt antisocial behavior.¹⁸⁴

As explained earlier, the nineteenth century beliefs of criminology have not changed in Mexico but have served as a scientific justification for sexist, classist, and racist subtexts. As such, the nineteenth century beliefs in “harmony between moral beauty and physical beauty: every good person looks beautiful, while the morality of a bad person, a criminal, renders her ‘ugly”¹⁸⁵ seem prevalent in Mexico. Barraza’s face has been analyzed by criminologists following these standards as to “prove” Barraza’s criminality. Martín Barrón and Isabel Bueno, just like Roumagnac in the nineteenth century, have stated that Barraza’s lack of “beauty,” which for them is visible through her features and facial expressions, reveals her criminality, thus rendering Barraza an innate criminal and further serving as evidence of her pathology.

¹⁸⁵ Phillips, "Identifying the Criminal."
For academic criminal psychologist Isabel Bueno, Barraza “has a problem with feminine identity, since ‘she has a very marked virile appearance.’”\textsuperscript{186} Bueno is following the criminal physiognomic classifications of Martinez and Vergara in the nineteenth century who in support of their conclusions cite an old Spanish proverb from the colonial period: “Never trust …a woman who talks like a man.”\textsuperscript{187} Barraza’s criminality then goes far beyond her crimes. Barraza’s crimes are not only her homicides but as well, her falling outside of the normative roles of femininity.

Just as “Wournos’s abuse history and marginal occupation and class were cited as evidence of her pathology and inherent criminality,”\textsuperscript{188} Barraza’s own history of marginalization and abuse, and her profession as a wrestler and maid, have been further used to pathologize her. Barraza was sold by her alcoholic mother in exchange for three beers to Jose Lugo when Barraza was only twelve years old. She was sexually abused and gave birth to her first son at sixteen years of age. At twenty-four Barraza witnessed the violent murder of her twelve-year-old son by a group of young alcoholic men. This history of abuse is used by criminologists, media and officials as evidence that Barraza killed out of “rage and hatred” towards a female figure.\textsuperscript{189} According to police, media and criminologists, elderly women detonated Barraza’s uncontrollable anger, due to the abuses perpetrated by her mother.\textsuperscript{190}

Like the Wournos case in the United States, that of Barraza “just barely qualifies”\textsuperscript{191} as that of a serial killer. According to Seltzer, the FBI defines serial murder simply “as involving an offender associated with the killing of at least four victims, over a period

\textsuperscript{186} Institucional Dirección de Comunicación, "La Mataviejitas:"Una Sociópata", Asegura Académica De La Uia,“ (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006).
\textsuperscript{187} Buffington, Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico 51.
\textsuperscript{190} Juan Carlos Aguilar García, "La Mataviejitas Pertenece Al Tipo De Asesino Serial Sin Plan," Crónica, January 28 2006.
\textsuperscript{191} Picart, "Crime and the Gothic: Sexualizing Serial Killers ": 29.
greater than seventy-two hours.”\footnote{Seltzer, Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture.} Wournos killed six men and Barraza has confessed to three murders, and even if prosecutors estimate she has committed 24 to 49 crimes,\footnote{Agustin Salgado, “Del Mataviejitas, 24 De 32 Asesinatos: Renato Sales,” La Jornada, November 17 2005.} she has been sentenced to 759 years in prison for 16 murders.\footnote{Mirna Servín, ”Dan 759 Años De Prisión a La Mataviejitas,” La Jornada, April 1 2008.} Barraza’s sentence of 759 years is not common in Mexico City; it is probably the highest number of years in prison someone has been sentenced to serve. This sentence thus also speaks to her criminalization for falling outside the norms of femininity in Mexico. Feminist criminologists have pointed out

“that women who face criminal charges and are outside the judiciary’s idea of normal womanhood are punished for this deviancy as well as for the actual crime, and that the severity of the sentences is dependent on the extent that their offence and behaviour deviate from dominant gender expectations.”\footnote{Susan Edwards, Women in Trial. Manchester University Press: Manchester (1984) quoted in Ruth Ford, "the Man-Woman Murderer": Sex Fraud, Sexual Inversion and the Unmentionable 'Article' in 1920s Australia," Gender & History 12, no. 1 (2000): 170.}

The “look” of a serial killer

In his book El nudo del Silencio: tras la pista de una asesina serial, La Mataviejitas, Mexican criminologist Martín Barrón published a set of three photos focusing on the eyes of Juana Barraza (Fig. 5). All three photos are taken the same day that Barraza was captured and profiled as La Mataviejitas. The only thing that differentiates the three photos is the lighting and angle. In the first photo, the eyes of Barraza are looking to the right; the gaze is not directed at the camera. The photo, purposefully or not, has a blurry effect that renders the eyes unidentifiable. The title of this photo reads: “The look of Barraza at the moment of her detention.” In the second photo, entitled “The look of Barraza the day of her capture,” the lighting is especially yellow so as to reflect the detention room where the viewer can appreciate more detailed features of Barraza’s eyes, getting a little glimpse of her makeup. The gaze is again not directed to the camera but slightly askew, giving the impression that she is looking nowhere. The final photo
provides a close-up of Barraza’s eyes: again her gaze is not directed at the camera, but the image further highlights her skin tone and texture. This last photo reads “The look of Barraza at her presentation to the media.”

There is no information on the time at which the photos were taken, but they do claim to differentiate “the look” of the serial killer at three different moments. The lighting and the manner in which the photos are taken are embedded within the history of photography and criminality where photographs of criminals are supposed “to prove the existence of the innate, visible traits in deviants or to serve as a dispassionate document of their deeds.” The cultural circumstances under which the set of photos were taken already influence personal perceptions by both the viewers and the photographer about Barraza’s criminality. Knowing that the photos are those of the recently profiled Mataviejitas predisposes the viewers to distinguish the inner “pathological” traits of the serial killer in Barraza.

Furthermore, as David Green observes, photographic images cannot be regarded as independent of the context in which they are presented and “their intelligibility as representations” should be judged with regard to the functions they intended to facilitate and the objectives which they serve in social activity. The photos of the looks of Barraza are published in a book whose sole concern is to demonstrate scientifically that Barraza is a serial killer. These same photos published in another book, with another title, might be perceived differently by both the viewers and the producers. Their objective is to serve as evidence of Barraza’s innate criminality. However, rather than the photographs revealing the criminality of Barraza, they demonstrate that the use of photography as “scientific” evidence necessitates certain assumptions, specifically understandings of criminals by viewers, and mostly should be considered in the context they are presented.

196 Barrón Cruz, El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas.
The photographs of Barraza’s “looks” are presented by Barrón as ‘objective’ proof and ‘scientific’ evidence that Barraza is indeed *La Mataviejitas*. Moreover, Barrón frames the three looks with a quote from Robert Hare, a researcher on pathology and criminality, who claims that, “the fixed look of the psychopath is more a prelude of self-gratification and the exercise of power than a simple interest or attention.”\(^{199}\) This ‘scientific’ explanation, follows the nineteenth century physiognomy school of thought which, “under the banner of scientific theory,” developed the idea that the “innate nature of the criminal,” was identifiable through a ‘reading’ of his/her features and facial expressions.\(^{200}\) According to Hare, the “look” of a serial killer is “cold,” “harsh” and “intense,” and Barrón was able to testify to the coldness and harshness of Barraza through a personal interview with her. Barrón stated that during the interview Barraza’s eyes never showed any sign of remorse or preoccupation.\(^{201}\) I am sure coldness, harshness and intensity describe the look of someone perpetuating violence; however, they also describe the look of many individuals who might not be serial killers. The way in which one can determined the qualities of a look is subjective but through photography we seem to “know the criminal and the details of the violent crime in a way that is profoundly mysterious and ultimately reassuring.”\(^{202}\) Our knowledge of the “look” of the serial killer is predetermined by our knowledge that Barraza has been declared *La Mataviejitas*.

Additionally, criminalizing Barraza because of her “look” as a serial killer presupposes the ideology that criminals have a different “look”: an “animal-like gaze” which translates into his/her expression of emotions.\(^{203}\) Barraza’s “tranquil” and “serene” look when arrested translates into a revelation of her pathological inability to feel emotions, rendering her a criminal.

\(^{199}\) Hare quoted Barrón Cruz, *El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas*, 166.
\(^{200}\) Ibid., 14. italics in original
\(^{201}\) Ibid., 166.
\(^{203}\) Ibid.
The sketches that looked like Barraza, the three-dimensional sketch and the photographs of the looks of Barraza appear to be more a testament that “scientific theory” is susceptible to cultural bias and the product of the circumstances than a testament to her innate criminality or police work. Rather than the “evidence” or “similarities with the sketches”, it is the narration and discourses around Barraza’s detention that makes her La Mataviejitas. For example, Juana Barraza was interviewed on national TV a week before her arrest, commenting on her enthusiasm for *lucha libre*. No one identified her as “very similar” to the sketches even though she was wearing a red sweater. On national TV, Juana Barraza was just a very enthusiastic participant; her body and look were nothing but those of a wrestling fan.

I am not arguing that Barraza is not *La Mataviejitas* or that she should not be responsible for her crimes. My purpose is to point out the resources used by police as evidence of Barraza’s criminality. The photos of the “look” of Barraza as *La Mataviejitas* serve more as a weak reassurance to the public that police and criminologists have captured the serial killer and there will be no more homicides against elderly woman than “scientific evidence” of Barraza’s inner criminality.

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Performing *Mexicanidad*: Criminality and *Lucha libre*

Juana Barraza Samperio, a wrestler known as *La Dama del Silencio* (the Lady of Silence), has been declared the first female serial killer in Mexico, despite the fact that at least two other people had been arrested as the suspected Matoviejitas. On April 2004, Araceli Vázquez García was detained as a suspect for the robbery of ten houses and one homicide of an elderly woman. Araceli Vázquez García “pretended to be a nurse” in order to gain access to the homes of older ladies, which according to police was the *modus operandi* of *El Matoviejitas*. However, neither media nor authorities called Araceli Vázquez “*La Matoviejitas*”. Araceli is currently detained in a women’s prison, Santa Marta Acatitla, and sentenced to 42 years in prison. One can further argue that because police were looking for a man they could not conceive of a woman as having committed the crimes.

Similarly, on September 12 2004, police arrested and convicted Jorge Mario Tablas Silva, accused of killing two elderly women. Tablas also dressed as a nurse in women’s clothing, used a wig and suffocated an older woman with a pair of tights (the *modus operandi* that police attributed to the serial killer). Tablas pretended to work for the city government’s program of monthly aid for older citizens. Tablas was “sentenced to 61 years in prison for the killing of two older women.” Neither media nor police paid attention to Tablas. One can presume that because he was not a transvestite, nor a homosexual, he was not the serial killer police were looking for (although the profile of the serial killer as a homosexual appeared in the news after his detention). In the journal Tablas left on the crime scene, used by police to find him, Tablas wrote: “I know I am the Apostol Juan, the ghost of whom my mother told me through a spiritualist session,” and further describes his crimes as the acts of a third person named “El

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205 Although contradictory accounts if Las Poquianchis are the first female serial killers, Barraza is undoubtedly been referred to by news reports as the second serial killer in Mexico after Goyo Cardenas.
207 Ibid.
208 Servín and Salgado, "De 1998 a La Fecha, 49 Asesinatos De Ancianos."
209 Ibid.
Maligno” (the evil). I am not qualifying these statements as pathological but I would just like to question why media and politicians have not called Tablas “El Mataviejitas” the “pathological serial killer”?

Neither Vázquez nor Tablas have caused the media uproar that Juan Barraza has. I argue that Juan Barraza gave media and official authorities the perfect story. Barraza’s wrestling practice and body sexually transgressed the codes of female normativity, thus leading criminologists, police and media to read Barraza’s body as that of a pathological serial killer, the one and only La Mataviejitas.

As soon as police found out Juan Barraza was “in the public world of the lucha libre known as La Dama del Silencio,” La Dama del Silencio and La Mataviejitas became one. “La Mataviejitas forced her victims using the strength she acquired in the lucha libre.” Press coverage further stated that “‘La Dama del Silencio’ of the lucha libre is the woman accused of killing elderly women.” It is this merging of personas, La Mataviejitas – the serial killer disguised as a nurse and La Dama del Silencio – the wrestler disguise of Juan Barraza, which has been used by media and police as evidence that Juan Barraza is La Mataviejitas. The El/La Mataviejitas case was officially closed after the arrest of Barraza despite the fact that even police had recognized that there are more than 30 homicides that “still need to be solved.” There is no talk of who killed the other 30 women and while I haven’t been able to find if there have been killings of elderly woman after January 2006, the police have already stated that “there might be other copycats on their way.”

La Dama del Silencio became La Mataviejitas, and vice versa, more so than Juan Barraza herself. I argue that discourses of criminality and the spectacle of lucha libre intersect within Mexican culture to police and perform the parameters of mexicanidad.

211 Agustín Salgado and Mirna Servín, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer," La Jornada, January 26 2006.
212 Agustín Salgado and Mirna Servín, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer," La Jornada, January 26 2006.

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reinforcing but also revealing the limits of Mexican masculinity and femininity as subject to redefinition. This chapter focuses on this intersection as a potent site for denaturalizing Mexican masculinity and femininity and redressing the raced, classed, gendered and sexualized limits of *mexicanidad* and criminality that have served to exclude so many from the rights of full citizenship in Mexico.

I take the notion of *mexicanidad* from Mexican cultural theorists Carlos Monsiváis (1997) and Octavio Paz (1961), who defined *mexicanidad* as a pervasive ideology of Mexican national identity based on an idealized myth of masculinity whose main characteristics are the figure of the *mestizo* (descendants of the mix of the Spanish and Indigenous through the literal and metaphorical rape of colonization) and the macho (the male figure that compensates for inferiority through the assertion of his virility).\(^{216}\) Paz further argues that the idealized Mexican was the mestizo whose image became entangled with the macho in the Mexican imaginary.

First, I demonstrate how *lucha libre* contributes to the production of *Mexicanidad* through an analysis of the performances that constitute it; paying particular attention to the news report narrations of Juana Barraza’s wrestling practice. I will also analyze criminality discourses regarding Juana Barraza as *La Dama del Silencio* by criminologist Barrón and neuropsychologist Ostrosky, both of whom have played a predominant role in determining Barraza’s culpability through the scientific evidence. Second, I will point out the challenges that Barraza as *La Dama del Silencio* and as *La Mataviejitas* poses to the notion of *Mexicanidad*. Finally, I will look at how the merged persona of *La Mataviejitas* and *La Dama del Silencio* has circulated in popular culture through a song and music video by underground singer Amandititita, a novel by Victor Ronquillo entitled *Ruda de Corazón: El Blues de La Mataviejitas* (2006), and a video in the cultural police center in Mexico City.

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Born Mexican: born wrestler, born criminal

Mary–Lee Mulholland argues that “one of the most important strategies in the imaginings, performances and productions of *mexicanidad* are the nostalgic narrations of certain origin myths.”217 These origin myths always refer back to the majestic Indigenous civilizations and the horrific colonization “that led to the creation of the *mestizo* nation.”218 Mulholland argues that “*Mariachi* is a national myth” which delimits and produces *mexicanidad*.219 I take from Mulholland that other national mythical figures such as professional wrestlers, who similarly draw upon the origin myths, also contribute to the delimitation and production of *mexicanidad*.

First, professional wrestlers constantly draw upon origin myths rooted in colonization. For example, Perro Aguayo, one of the most successful wrestlers in Mexico, stated in an interview that Mexicans identify with him because he is the “classic *indio*, that race of bronze that goes forward despite all adverse circumstances.”220 Moreover, he stated that “one is born to be a wrestler.”221 Similarly, Konnan has affirmed “wrestling is in my blood.”222 Additionally, professional wrestlers, from El Santo in the 1940s to Mistico in 2008, have constructed and produce a performance of *Mexicanidad*, in so far as they contribute to the idea of authenticity (being born a wrestler, having it in the blood, dying if not been able to wrestle) which constitutes a pillar in the production of *mexicanidad*.

Similarly, *lucha libre* performance, which has been enormously popular in Mexico since the 1930s, constitutes one of the most important performances of Mexican national identity, thus contributing to the norms and notions of *mexicanidad* for its mostly working-class spectators. *Lucha libre* is “the most entrenched popular spectacle in

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218 Ibid. italics in original
219 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid., 26.
Mexico." More than demonstrating competitiveness in the sport, lucha libre seeks to offer a “spectacular performance” to the audience in which every single element of lucha libre is a performance of mexicanidad.

The wrestlers are introduced by pretty women wearing bikinis that they model throughout the ring, and/or escort the wrestlers as they enter the arena in a show of laser lights and loud music. The performance of lucha libre continues with melodramatic combats by wrestlers whose personality is based on their nickname (i.e. El Santo, Blue Demond, Perro Aguayo, Mistico, or La Dama del Silencio), on their máscara (mask) or cabellera (long hair), and on the colorful, shiny, and elaborate costumes. The mostly heteronormative framework for these male, macho, mestizo wrestlers -- the mascaras, the cabelleras, the melodramatic combats, the shiny colors of the costumes -- are all constitutive elements of Mexicanidad.

Moreover, the actual fight between opponents through a mix of judo, Roman-Greek fighting style and boxing is also a well-choreographed spectacle. Adding to the mix is the different types of llaves (locks) performed superbly by the wrestlers, and whose final use is to defeat the opponent at the count of three -- two of three “falls” gives the final win. Lucha libre’s performance is further enacted through spectacular aerial and flying moves which further distinguish lucha libre from professional wrestling in Japan or the United States, making Mexican lucha libre the “authentic” one. Finally spectators (mostly working-class) also participate in the performance, shouting to the wrestlers over and over: “blood”, “kill him/her”, and “finish him/her”, combined with an endless stream of curses.

In the performance of the melodramatic combat of lucha libre, the wrestler is either rudo or técnico. The luchadores rudos (rude wrestlers) are commonly the bad guys who feel

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223 Ibid.
and fuel the “hatred of the public” and fight without technique or proper schooling. One of the most famous Mexican wrestlers, now a legend, was El Santo (The Saint). El Santo started his wrestling career at seventeen years old as a rudo (rude) “doing forbidden things” that weren’t allowed in lucha libre such as “knees to the stomach, really low blows, llaves de rendición [locks to make the opponent surrender]” amongst others things. When the image of El Santo changed to a symbol of justice through his character El Enmascarado de plata (the silver masked) in films and comic strips, El Santo became a técnico, or the good one who fights with technique and doesn’t need to “play dirty” to win. The combat between rudos and técnicos is the fight between good and evil. Just like mariachis, wrestlers “perform their authenticity through the blood, sweat and tears of its performers and its performance.”

La Dama del Silencio fights as a ruda, a “ruda de corazon” – rude from the bottom of her heart, as Juana Barraza herself stated when she was casually interviewed by national broadcaster TV Azteca on the Arena Coliseo only a week before she was arrested and then declared La Mataviejitas. That La Dama del Silencio was a ruda wrestler was a sign to the media and to criminologists that Barraza was La Mataviejitas. Being a ruda was a testament to Barraza’s lack of schooling and technique. Fighting as a ruda showed her “lack of morality” as the rudos are the bad ones, the evil combatants.

In his book El Nudo del Silencio: tras la pista de una asesina en serie, La Mataviejitas, criminologist and police collaborator Martín Barrón further merges La Dama del Silencio as a ruda wrestler into La Mataviejitas in order to pathologize Barraza. Barrón, in the section entitled “La Dama del Silencio and Hare’s scale” attempts to establish the links between Robert Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) and the results of Barraza’s psychological and escanograma exams “in order to detect the possible presence

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225 Elena Poniatowska, “‘El Santo’ a Dos De Tres Caídas,” in Todo México (Mexico City: Editoriales Diana, 1990), 259.
226 Ibid., 258.
227 Mulholland, "Mariachi, Myths and Mestizaje: Popular Culture and Mexican National Identity."
229 Wrestling Arena located downtown Mexico City in the street of Peru number 77.
230 Barrón Cruz, El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas.
231 Ibid., 105.
of psychopathy in Barraza.”

Point nine on Hare’s checklist, “the need for excitement,” states that psychopaths’ need for excitement is vital since “they commit their criminal acts for excitement or emotion.”

Barrón deduced in this point from his personal interview with Barraza that “apart from the excitement that came from robbery and homicides in the history of Barraza, another excitement is found in the fact that at age 30, she started to practice lucha libre.”

For Barrón, Barraza’s wrestling practice caught his “attention” because according to him, Barraza “lacked physical preparation since her wrestling knowledge was assimilated through TV or through going to the arenas to watch the spectacle.”

There are in total twelve points on Hare’s checklist with which to detect a possible psychopath, ranging from “simple and superficial mind, lack of commitment, problems during childhood, antisocial behavior, lack of remorse and empathy and impulsiveness” amongst others. Barraza is being criminalized, for example, because when explaining her modus operandi she did it “without showing any emotion, coldly narrating the way in which she selected her victims” or for “not being able to remember her jobs as a maid.”

Barrón, after interpreting Barraza’s facial expressions, activities and emotions concludes that “it is evident that Barraza fulfills [...] the twelve principal criteria of [Hare’s psychopathy checklist’s] classification.” It is important to highlight that Robert Hare believes that “the psychopathy that produces the serial killer originated in biological predispositions and social factors.”

As in the Victorian era, ideologies of criminality were based on the belief that “impulsiveness” and “improvidence” were signs of moral inferiority shared by lower-classes, women, the poor, and criminals.

Furthermore, Feggy Ostrosky, Director of the National Institute of Neurobiology, also merged La Dama del Silencio with La Mataviejitas. In her book, Mentes Asesinas: La...
Violencia en tu Cerebro (Killer Minds: The Violence in your Brain), Ostrosky starts the chapter on Barraza by narrating, as a novel, Barraza’s thoughts the morning of January 25, 2006 (the date of her arrest). According to Ostrosky, Juana Barraza looked at herself in the mirror and saw La Dama del Silencio, while listening to the news talking about El Mataviejitas.240 Juana Barraza met Ana María de los Reyes in her apartment and after an altercation over how much Juana would get paid for her services as a maid, “inexplicably” inside Juana’s mind “all the images of previous suffering came back: the abandonment of her father, the constant abuse of her alcoholic mother who gave her away at age 13 in exchange for three damn beers.”241 Juana then strangled Ana Maria with a stethoscope. The victim could not do anything before the “corpulence” of Juana Barraza. After killing Ana Maria, Juana had to regain “some air for that incomprehensible internal beast that used to come back once in a while.”242

Ostrosky describes her first encounter with Barraza as a “fight of power”,243 as if they were in a wrestling match “measuring strength.” Ostrosky deduced from the neuropsychological exams that Juana “had good handling of social relations. However, during the whole process of assessment she looked suspicious, distrustful and manipulative.”244 Moreover, Juana had “difficulties in some motor functions like alternative movements with both hands” which were more “pronounced with the left hand” thus suggesting a “pathology that affects frontal areas of the brain.”245 This was further corroborated with the electrophysiological evaluation where Juana demonstrated a “significant deceleration in the electroencephalographic activity”246 when shown different images (Fig. 6). This scientific language justifies subjective interpretations by Ostrosky who concluded that because for Juana the “disagreeable stimulus with or without moral content” (disagreeable stimulus for Ostrosky is an image of a trash can, for

240 Feggy Ostrosky, Mentes Asesinas: La Violencia En Tu Cerebro (Ciudad de México: Hachette Filipacchi Expansión de R.L. de C.V., 2008), 180.
241 Ibid., 181.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid., 189.
244 Ibid., 204.
245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.,204.
example) were processed as neutral are proof that “Juana was capable of killing helpless women.”

For Ostrosky, when Juana expresses “remorse”, it is just a “simple imitation of a situation that she doesn’t understand” because the results of all the tests show that Juana has no emotional sensations. The face is believed not only to represent a feeling or emotion but to become the person, which becomes the emotion. As Deleuze explains, “the face is an object or instrument that indicates something.” Therefore, what is represented in the face gives an interpretation of who the person is. This interpretation is thus left to the subjective interpretation of the reader. Ostrosky’s knowledge of positivist science implies a certain knowledge that most people might not have access to. She can thus provide a “scientific” explanation of Barraza’s face, along with her cerebral wave movements, which allegedly are seen to derive from an innate criminality.

As Foucault explains in “The Dangerous Individual,” at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the psychiatrization of criminal danger, crime “would arise out of a state which one might call the zero degree of insanity.” For Barraza, it was the “beast within that came out once in a while” or her internal “excitement” by lucha libre. Barraza’s neuropsychological diagnosis follows the nineteenth-century psychiatrization of crime, where individuals are believed to be born with certain cerebral characteristics or biological conditions that appear suddenly at any given moment as a result of their monomania or insanity. Ostrosky and Barrón continue this nineteenth-century practice as they “emphasize the character of the criminal” rather than the crime in which Juana participated.

Foucault further suggests that the criminal is responsible for the crime by his very existence; the “crime is linked to the risk of criminality that the very personality of the

247 Ibid., 212.
248 Ibid., 214.
250 Ibid.
individual constitutes.” By pathologizing the criminal, more than attributing responsibility to him or her, penal law is defining his or her existence as an incorrigible criminal. Ostrosky considered Barraza’s crimes as being committed “without reason”, stating there was a link between Barraza’s childhood environment and her alleged pathology. Barrón and Ostrosky refer to Barraza as the “dangerous individual” whose criminality is explained by her pathology and her pathology is proven by the measurement of her cerebral waves. Barraza’s description as a pathological serial killer renders her as a criminal not for her crimes but for that which she is by nature: a dangerous individual.

For Barrón and Ostrosky, Barraza’s social circumstances, but mostly biological factors, render her a born criminal, continuing the eighteenth-century belief that criminality is innate. Mexican leading criminologists in the nineteenth century, like Carlos Roumagnac, adopted both Italian (biological) and French (environmental) approaches to criminality in order to develop a typology of the criminal in Mexico. Mexican criminologists at the time reflected the elite anxieties about lower-class Mexicans, most of them mestizos. As Robert Buffington explains, these discourses of criminality offer the raced, classed, gendered and sexualized prototypes of the ideal post-colonial Mexican, who enjoys full citizenship rights in Mexico. Contrary to the ideal Mexican (the mestizo), the cosmic race of Vazconselos in the 1960s, post-colonial elites’ ideal Mexican was white and with European ancestry.

Because Barraza was a born criminal she was not a born wrestler. According to Barrón, “it can be affirmed that the triggering moment to incursion in the homicidal practice was [Barraza’s] retirement from lucha libre.” Juana Barraza had “the power to decide who

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252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
254 Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico*
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Barrón Cruz, *El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas*, 162.
lived and who didn’t deserved to continue living, maybe as a reminiscence of what happens in the lucha [libre].” 258

**Nicknames, masks and disguises**

Despite and because of continuous gender and sexual bias on the part of the police and the media in their search for *El/La Mataviejitas*, Barraza’s non-normative femininity led officials to represent *La Dama del Silencio* as *La Mataviejitas*. The merging of nicknames, *La Mataviejitas* and *La Dama del Silencio* helped to pathologize Barraza, not for the homicides against elderly women but because her wrestling body sexually transgresses the codes of female normativity, thus leading criminologists, police and media to read Barraza’s body as that of a pathological serial killer.

The nickname of *El Mataviejitas* was given by the media and used by media, police and criminologists to refer to the alleged serial killer of elderly women. The nickname, *El Mataviejitas*, as in the Jack the Ripper case in 1888, became a “media event.” 259 This is the only time in Mexican history that a nickname has preceded the identification of serial killer. Ian Hacking in “Making up People” defines dynamic nominalism as the kind of nominalism in which “a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented.” 260 I argue that it is the naming of the serial killer that has defined and determined the police responses and public reaction. As soon as the name was given, a search started. There have been other nicknames given to serial killers, for example *El Matagays* or *El Sádico*, and most recently *El Poeta Caníbal*. However, these nicknames were given by media *after* their arrest. There is no account of how many gay men in the Zona Roza (gay village in Mexico City) had been murdered, dismembered and stuffed in a suitcase before police detained Raúl Osiel Marroquín Reyes, who confessed to killing

258 Ibid., 163.
four homosexuals in a month and “feeling no remorse, and if he had the opportunity he would do it again more intelligently so as to not get caught.”

In Mexico, as soon as police declared the existence of the *El Mataviejitas*, police knew certain characteristics (male and middle age, for instance) of the serial killer, independently of the witness accounts (who pointed to a woman). As soon as police started to look for a serial killer, *El Mataviejitas*, police came up with a whole set of ideas about what a serial killer is, does, how he/she behaves and what he/she needs. Certainly these assumptions and descriptions didn’t come from police experience with serial killers in Mexico. The category of serial killer emerged at the same time prosecutors decided there was a serial killer in Mexico, and as Hacking points out, these categories are bound up with the “possibilities” that limit the subjectivity of a categorized individual. These possibilities, as Hacking suggests, are defined by the beliefs as to who the criminal is, what he does and did, and will do.

Neither news media nor the police gave much attention to El Sádico, whose arrest happened the same day as that of Juana Barraza. Similarly, police arrested José Luis Calva Zepeda, *El Poeta Caníbal*. Not only did Zepeda kill his girlfriends, he dismembered, cooked, and ate them. Yet there was no police search for a serial killer, despite having found at least five dismembered bodies following the same pattern. There number of women Zepeda killed is unknown; he was only convicted for the murder of his ex-girlfriend Alejandra Galeana before he committed suicide in prison.

There were no police investigations, sketches, informative pamphlets or media reports that warned gay men in Zona Rosa or young women in Estado, the area of the serial killers El Sádico or *El Poeta Caníbal*. After their arrest, El Sádico and *El Poeta Caníbal* each became just two of the many criminals in Mexico City; there are no songs, music videos, criminologist books or exhibitions about them.

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On the other hand, *La Dama del Silencio* as *La Mataviejitas* has been profiled in criminologist accounts and media reports as an extreme case of stranger violence. During the police search of Juana Barraza’s house, police found a photo of Juana Barraza in her wrestling costume as the *Dama del Silencio* (Fig. 7).\(^{264}\) The photograph shows *La Dama del Silencio* posing with the World Woman Wrestling Champion belt across her shoulder and waist, standing against a blue background with one hand on her waist, showing her muscular arm, and the other hand in front of her striking a pose. Barraza is wearing a bright pink Power Ranger-like suit with silver details along the legs and shoulders and bright pink and silver knee boots. Her face is covered with a silver and bright pink butterfly mask. Barraza’s wrestling photograph thus juxtaposes markers of her physical strength with those of femininity, codified through butterflies and the bright pink color of her suit. In doing so, the photo creates what Anne Balsamo calls a “gender ‘hybrid’ that invokes corporeal codes of femininity as well as of masculinity.”\(^{265}\)

A nickname is as definitive in *lucha libre* as it is in the narrations of serial killers; the name defines the persona. The nickname accompanies the costume and the máscara (mask) or cabellera (hair) of the wrestler, giving him/her a different wrestling persona. Máscaras have a historical significance in Mexico since they recall pre-Hispanic times invoking images of animals, gods and ancient heroes, constantly drawing upon origin myths and most importantly disguising the wrestler’s persona in the ring.

For example, El Santo, the greatest legend of Mexican wrestling, always kept his anonymity and no one ever saw his face. In wrestling matches the melodrama is played out when wrestlers fight Máscara contra Cabellera (mask against hair – usually long); when the loser of the battle loses his identity either through revealing his face or cutting his hair. Juana Barraza stated she was *La Dama del Silencio* in *lucha libre* because her


personality is “reserved and quiet.”

Barrón’s chapter on Barraza is entitled “desenmascarada” (unmasked); in lucha libre to unmask a wrestler is “not only to defeat but to humiliate the opponent.”

Heather Levi has argued that lucha libre’s theatricality challenges mainstream machismo in Mexico through the performance of certain wrestlers, like exóticos (wrestlers who fight in drag). Exóticos, who sometimes present themselves as homosexual role models, are male wrestlers, normally rudos, who appropriate feminine signs in their wrestling personas -- through feminine costumes, for example -- yet they are taken seriously (which doesn’t happen in any other sport or popular culture medium in Mexico). Levi argues that exóticos “contest the dramatic representation of machismo” in lucha libre as exóticos successfully un-man their opponents in the ring while also “rejecting the outward signs of manhood.”

Lucha libre provides a space for gender performance and performativity where “transvestite wrestlers actively and creatively reinscribe the conventional codes of masculine-feminine, subject-object, and phallic-open.”

I would like to add that exóticos contest the production of mexicanidad as they challenge the ideal mestizo/macho (heterosexual) wrestler. As such, female wrestlers also challenge lucha libre’s traditional performances. Although women wrestlers only fight other women and cannot literally un-man male opponents in the ring, they do so culturally, since female wrestlers transgress the codes of normative femininity inside and outside the ring.

Barraza’s wrestling body transgresses the normative gender and sex roles socially defined for women in Mexico. The physical strength that Barraza presents in the photograph as

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266 Jiménez, "Juana Barraza: Analfabeta, Su Madre La Regaló a Los 12 Años, Fue Violada Y Le Mataron Un Hijo a Batazos."

267 Levi, "Lean Mean Fighting Queens: Drag in the World of Mexican Professional Wrestling."

268 Ibid.

269 Ibid.

270 Ibid.: 282.

the La Dama del Silencio resists the “historical notions of the properly feminine body constituted as ‘weak and pathological’ and the culturally dominant codes of femininity that render women outside ‘sports as cults of masculinity,’” especially in a Mexican cultural context where sports and physical strength are only celebrated for men; female bodies are culturally accepted if “naturally” feminine, that is, if they do not threaten the dominant codes of the idealized Mexican, that is the mestizo and macho.

However, Barraza’s body is perceived by authorities and media not as a sign of resistance to normative feminine roles or challenging the norms of mexicanidad, but on the contrary, as evidence of her innate criminality: “the physical force is the instrument by which she pays her bills and killed old women, until yesterday, when she committed an error that resulted in her capture.” Moreover, there are numerous accounts that point to Barraza’s features, body and strength not as resisting dominant norms of femininity but as a sign of her pathology: that Barraza had “virile features,” her “humongous height” or her “short hair as a manifestation of her repressed sexuality.”

As Balsamo explains, to be female and strong implicitly violates traditional codes of feminine identity. Moreover, “violent women are seen as abandoning traditional femininity.” Barraza as La Dama del Silencio doubly trangresses Mexican female normativity. Barraza is not only strong but she is performing lucha libre, a spectacle mostly reserved for men. Although women wrestlers have performed in arenas since the 1950s they were only allowed in Mexico City arenas since 1986. Consequently, for the media and criminologists, Barraza’s wrestling practice and non-normative gender became the weapon she used to commit her allegedly multiple crimes.

272 Birke and Vines quoted in Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women, 42.
273 Agustin Salgado and Mirna Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer," La Jornada, January 26 2006.
274 Ostrosky, Mentes Asesinas: La Violencia En Tu Cerebro, 189.
275 Servín, "La Dama Del Silencio."
276 Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women.
277 Gilbert, "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes," 1282.
News reports of El Sádico or El Poeta Canibal don’t make references to their bodies, faces or physical appearance. Media representations of Juana Barraza follow the classic narrative of female serial killers, where the only possibility for representing a woman killer is through her gender, sexual deviance and manly features, thus judging Barraza not for killing elderly woman but for transgressing mexicanidad. Barraza’s corporeal strength is taken by press reports and criminological texts as a justification for her gender deviance and crimes, thus aligning Barraza’s representation with those of murderous women: “manly”, “masculine”, “robust” and “deviant.”

La Dama del Silencio reinforces class stereotypes implicit in cultural understandings of wrestling practice and in historical descriptions of criminals. News reports made reference to “her facial features, her hair style and red hair color as common to a certain class of class of women recognizable in Mexico City.”

Barraza’s corporeal strength and wrestling practice have been blamed for police homophobia and the assumption that El Mataviejitas was a man. During the three years that police struggled to find El/La Mataviejitas they were looking for “a man between 35 and 45 years old, with homosexual preferences.” Because police couldn’t imagine a woman serial killer they deduced the murderer was “a transvestite, since witnesses described a person dressed in women’s clothing but also with physical strength, broad-shouldered, strong, around 1.70 cm tall” who “could have suffered childhood abuse (sexual and psychological).”

Since police had established a profile of the serial killer that didn’t conform to Juana Barraza (as they were looking for a men, then a transvestite), criminologists profiled La Dama del Silencio. First, police stated that because Barraza was “tall,” “robust,” and “strong” police thought it was “a man dressed as a woman” making it clear that Juana Barraza was La Mataviejitas but serving to criminalize La Dama del Silencio instead of

279 Gilbert, "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes."
281 Barrón Cruz, El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas, 75.
282 Ibid., 164.
Juana Barraza. That is, the police and criminologist criminalize *La Dama del Silencio*’s transgressive body but not Juana Barraza for the killing of elderly women.

Second, the photograph of *La Dama del Silencio*, where Barraza is posing “proudly” with her championship belt, became evidence that, “like the rest of serial killers in the world, Juana Barraza Samperio, *La Mataviejitas*, was egocentric and fetishist.”

Third, for Ostrosky and Barrón, *La Dama del Silencio*, as a ruda wrestler, was evidence that Juana Barraza had an “aggressive nature” which she was able to vent through *lucha libre*, an aggressiveness that is also a common trait of serial killers, and as discussed in the previous chapter is seen as “unnatural” in women. Fourth, criminologists deduced that Barraza wrestled in order to become famous, another common cliché in the serial killer narratives, which suggest they kill in order to “become somebody”. Finally, Juana Barraza’s life with its succession of disguises (as a nurse and a power ranger) testified to the “chameleon-like quality” often attributed to serial killers.

In brief, serial killers are like wrestlers. They need a different persona to perform their trade. With the new persona, serial killers either kill or blend in to the crowd; wrestlers perform the fight between good and evil. It is this new persona that both acquire, either through the ring or in media narratives, that provides them with an identity. An identity renders serial killers and wrestlers mythic figures; celebrities. Serial killers have a “sanity mask” which allows them to act like “normal” individuals in between crimes.

Wrestlers have a mask to wrestle. Both have t-shirts made in their honour, and inspire films and songs.

For media and official authorities the merging of nicknames seemed to follow this reasoning: Juana Barraza dressed as a nurse to fool elderly woman into letting her into their houses to then kill them. Similarly, Juana Barraza deceived the public since all she

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284 Ostrosky, *Mentes Asesinas: La Violencia En Tu Cerebro*.

285 Ibid., 185.

286 Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture*, 44.

287 Lamas, "De Trasvestis Y Asesinos En Serie."

288 For more information on Serial killers as a big business in popular culture see Brian Jarvis, "Monsters Inc.: Serial Killers and Consumer Culture," *Crime, Media, Culture* 3, no. 3 (2007).
wanted from her wrestling practice was to be famous (following the principle that serial
killing is performed in order to become someone). Finally and most importantly Juana
Barraza tricked the police for over three years (since it was her fault for being so tall and
strong that police thought she was a man). For media and police, Juana Barraza only
existed through disguises either as a nurse or as pink power-ranger. In order to kill,
Barraza became La Mataviejitas and in order to wrestle she became La Dama del
Silencio. But it seems Barraza couldn’t exist any other way.

Considering that within the norms of mexicanidad as described by Paz, “Mexicans
considered women an instrument” for men and for society, it is not a stretch to argue
that Barraza’s life without máscaras didn’t exist, especially considering her lower-class
status. According to Paz, women don’t create but transmit or conserve the values of
society. However, I argue that Barraza as La Dama del Silencio challenges the
parameters of mexicanidad insofar as she defies normative roles of femininity. As Innis
points out, “women who adopt a persona that is strongly coded as masculine are
disturbing because they reveal the artificiality of femininity that is considered normal in
our society.” Barraza as the alleged La Mataviejitas challenges criminality discourses
on serial killing. As newspapers suggested, “nobody was ready for Juana Barraza.”

Killing as performance

The merging of personas of La Dama del Silencio as La Mataviejitas has circulated
through different popular culture sites. Amandiditita, an underground singer from
Mexico, and self-proclaimed “la reina de la anarcocumbia” (the queen of the
anarcocumbia) released a song entitled “La Mataviejitas”. On September 12 2007, a
music video that accompanies this song in Amandititita’s live performances was
uploaded to you tube.

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289 Paz, El Laberinto De La Soledad, 39.
292 Servin, "La Dama Del Silencio."
The video starts with Juana Barraza’s sitting in the police car, presumably after being arrested, looking at the camera. Her face is covered by the title “La Mataviejitas” that alarmingly appears on and off the screen against red and yellow backgrounds. The music starts with a heavy bass as the title “La Mataviejitas” continues to flash on and off screen. A rapid collage of Barraza’s face appears: Barraza’s face next to the three-dimensional bust done by police, Barraza being interviewed by police as she was fleeing the crime scene, the sketches used by police to find El/La Mataviejitas, a mug shot of Barraza, dissolving from these familiarized images to a still from a horror film.

In the next scene, a nurse with a red sweater is walking down the stairs of the government institute for social health, then she is walking on the streets careful to not be followed. She takes out of her very feminine blue purse some tights and smells them. A fetish for the black tights is clearly depicted. In the next scene someone is cleaning the house, caring for plants, eating cake and preparing tea. Viewers are led to assume she is an elderly woman. The same fast sequence of Barraza’s detention and the sketches of El/La Mataviejitas are presented before we see the young nurse in the elderly woman’s apartment. The nurse is forcing her to the couch, trying to asphyxiate the elderly woman with bare hands and then throwing her to the floor for a wrestling match. The nurse applies the llave voladora (a wrestling trick where one person falls on top of the other), the nurse applies another llave and the elderly lady moves her hands signaling she is “giving up.” In lucha libre when a wrestler moves his/her hands back and forth really quickly, it means he/she is giving up. The nurse then starts counting to five like in wrestling matches in order to declare a winner. The wrestling performance continues while the nurse takes out the pair of black tights and strangles the elderly woman who is comically pretending to defend herself. In the video the killing of elderly woman is performed as a lucha libre match. The nurse leaves the apartment and experiences a sort of ecstasy as she is featured skipping down the streets, turning around with her hands flying more like a ballerina than a professional wrestler. The last scene shows the fetishism (a characteristic assumed typical of serial killers) that the nurse has towards the
black tights as she is sitting on a park bench secretly smelling the tights while making sure she is not being watched.

What is interesting about what gets reproduced culturally by an independent production is the casting of the characters in this video. While the nurse is dressed in a white skirt and a red sweater (letting the public known it is *La Mataviejitas*) she is played by a very feminine woman who sits in the park crossed legged with her hands on her knees, showing a very normative femininity, the lack of which has characterized media representations of Barraza. On the other hand, the elderly woman is played by a man dressed as an elderly woman.

In this video the persona of the nurse, who is *La Mataviejitas*, is the same as that of a wrestler, as the killer uses wrestling techniques to defeat the elderly woman. *La Mataviejitas* is *La Dama del Silencio* but not Juana Barraza. What this implies is that the killing of elderly woman becomes a wrestling performance, which works to dehumanize the victim and the serial killer, *La Mataviejitas*, becomes a wrestler and the victim might not be really dying but just giving up. This performance of killing renders comedic the actual homicides against elderly woman.

The constant repetition and recreation of the killings are also performed in the lyrics of the song. The very catchy chorus states over and over “*La Mataviejitas, La Mataviejitas, La Mataviejitas, La Mataviejitas se quiere echar a tu abuelita*” (*La Mataviejitas* wants to do your grandmother). The use of the verb “do” rather than “strangle” or “assassinate” lends a sexual double entendre to the performance of killing as a wrestling match played in the video. This double entendre is also prevalent in serial killing discourses, as the figure of the serial killer is commonly that of a sex-criminal. Similarly, *lucha libre* performances use many *llaves of rendición* (locks to defeat the opponent) that “leave the losing wrestler not only helpless, but in a position of marked sexual vulnerability.”

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The lyrics further render the performance of wrestling/killing comedic as they claim, for example, that La Mataviejitas wants to kill elderly woman because she collects false teeth or that La Mataviejitas hates elderly women because they don’t invite her to their INSEN (National Institute for Elderly Citizens) parties.

For Monsiváis, “machismo is also a complaining demand for recognition … Having been dispossessed, the never-quite-adult macho from the popular classes offers up the credulity of his puerile, deteriorated and sacrificial ego for commercialization.” This exploitation of the dispossessed “popular classes” is at work in the consumption of machismo in Mexican wrestling practice, paraphernalia and commercial culture. Following Monsiváis, we can read the increasing popularity of lucha libre (and its demonstration of machismo) for middle/upper-class Mexican and global consumers of “third world” kitsch as a way of revelling in the spectacular disenfranchisement of the increasingly visible poor, popular classes, in Mexico.

This video might only accompany live presentations but I take it as representative of the fantastic element of killing as performance. Furthermore, while it might only circulate among a small niche of middle class “alternative” sector of Mexico City, it shows how different socially stratified public opinions process the Mataviejitas.

Ruda de Corazón

Journalist Victor Ronquillo wrote a novel based on La Mataviejitas. What is important for me to highlight from this novel is that, as in Amandititia’s video and in Trujillo’s novel, Barraza’s identity as La Dama del Silencio also becomes one with that of La Mataviejitas.

First, the title of the novel, Ruda de Corazón, makes reference to Barraza’s declaration on TV Azteca as being an enthusiastic devotee of lucha libre. Second, the novel narrates through a third person’s voice the life of La Dama del Silencio, her difficulties training

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294 Monsiváis, Mexican Postcards, 15.
in a gymnasium, being a female wrestler, and working with a promoter who never really believed in her, with special emphasis on the photograph of La Dama del Silencio posing with the championship belt and imagining the wrestler’s pride and famous life.

Furthermore, it merges La Dama del Silencio and La Mataviejitas when Trujillo introduces two judicial cops, Luciano Nuñez and Gerardo Silva, visiting La Dama del Silencio. Nuñez had to stop by the wrestler’s house to collect his pay, as he was extorting La Dama del Silencio. The wrestler paid him with a ring that had “a shiny stone.” Silva, who becomes a taxi driver years later, looks at the photograph of La Mataviejitas published in the newspapers and realizes that he had met her years before, that she was La Dama del Silencio, and he would never forget “the hands of the wrestler.”295 Juana Barraza had indeed been extorted by judicial police Moisés Flores Domínguez, who in 1996 discovered that Juana Barraza stole houses and asked for a bribe of 12,000 pesos in exchange for not convicting her.296 Except for one report, this extortion, which probably lasted years, is rarely mentioned in news reports. The judicial police officer was supposed to be in police custody but I haven’t been able to find out if he has been convicted.

The novel mixes journalistic reports into the story, tracing the life of La Dama del Silencio, the victims, the killings and the police response as the years progressed. This is the only instance where Barraza’s life is not used as an explanation of her pathology but as way to show that Barraza herself was a victim too, as Ronquillo explains, of a “society that is enormously machista, exclusive and unequal.”297 Trujillo stated that he is not interested in “denying the legal responsibility” of Barraza but in showing that the serial killer of elderly women is a “lamentable result of the social degradation” that Mexico

City experiences.” For Trujillo the novel is, in his own words, a response to the “stigmatization and media lynching” of Juana Barraza. Contrary to the video of Amandititita, this novel doesn’t try to render the killings comedic but tries to humanize both the victims and Juana Barraza. However, it reduces the causes of criminality to circumstances.

Centro Cultural Policial

The Centro Cultural Policial (Cultural Police Centre) in downtown Mexico City hosted an exhibition on serial killers starting in December 2006. The exhibition of serial killers in El Centro Policial resembles “la casa de los sustos” (the “House of Fright” that every fair has) that intends to scare children with macabre stages accompanied by different props corresponding to specific serial killers. It starts with the Blood Countess, Elizabeth Báthory, in the sixteenth century, passes through 1880s London with Jack the Ripper and of course ends with Juana Barraza, La Mataviejitas. Through the thirteen different areas the visitor has earphones that recount the crimes like a story, complete with surround-sound. The objective of the journey is to travel into the mind of a serial killer.

The hall of La Mataviejitas showcases the original three-dimensional bust created by Patricia Payan for the Department of General Justice in Mexico City in 2005, behind a glass case. It includes photographs of La Dama del Silencio, photographs of Barraza, and police official documents featuring Barraza’s fingerprints. The most interesting prop in this area is a video presumably produced by police, which recreates the killings of elderly women. The video starts with the face of Juana Barraza. The next scene shows an older woman sitting in a chair; while another woman appears from behind and starts suffocating the elderly woman presumably with tights or a stethoscope. The elderly woman dies suffocated while the other younger woman, who is bigger and stronger, is

299 Ibid.
seen angrily staring at the camera. The video only lasts a couple of minutes and then it starts over again.

Unlike Amandititita’s video, this one makes no allusions to *La Dama del Silencio* as *La Mataviejitas* but rather to Juana Barraza. There are no llaves performed by the killer to suffocate the elderly woman. However I would like to argue that this video too renders the killings of elderly women a performance. The video is part of an exhibition that already profiles serial killers as notorious characters in history, the sound and staging renders the crimes more than realistic; it renders them theatrical. The most important feature, I think, is the constant repetition of the killings, played over and over again, and performed in the video.

Robert Ressler, the special FBI agent who in 1970s “coined the term serial killer” talked about “naming the event” as on the one hand “‘crimes in series’ committed “one … then another and another and another in a fairly repetitive way,’” And on the other hand, as “the series of adventures … on Saturdays at the movies that will lure you back in every week, without a satisfactory ending, ‘because it increases not lessenes the tension’ of exactly what happens in the mind of serial killers.” Seltzer takes this further and argues that the “‘real meaning behind the term ‘serial killer’ is the internal competition between repetition and representation.” The video of the killings in the Centro Cultural Policial is in an internal competition between representing Juana Barraza as *La Mataviejitas*, and constantly repeating the strangulation of an elderly woman. Seltzer makes an analogy between “addiction to representation” and “acts of killing” that is “an equation between acts of violence and the relative passivity of ‘just looking.’” As such, the video brings the acts of killing (the repetition of the strangulation) on par with the addiction to representation (act looking by the visitors).

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301 Ibid.
302 Ibid., 65.
Drawing from Seltzer’s ideas, these videos are only possible in a wound culture addicted to violence, where “scenes of spectacularized bodily violence are inseparable from the binding of violence to scene, spectacle and representation.”  

This spectacle of killing, repeated over and over until the day finishes only to start again the next day, provokes a distance and a fascination with the killings and the killer rendering the homicides against elderly women an eerie performance.

Although this video is made by police, its intent is to circulate in a cultural form. Most importantly, I take this video to be a signifier of how the police want the public to understand Juana Barraza. Following critiques on serial killer narratives, one can conclude that this video works to create “a dominant understanding of a serial killer as inhuman” prevalent in cinematic and media representations.  

La Dama del Silencio as La Mataviejitas is a comedic performance for Amandititita, a mirror of an equal and unjust society for novelist Victor Trujillo, and part of an eerie fantastic world in the police cultural centre.

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303 Ibid.:129
304 Reisinger, "Murder and Banality in the Contemporary Fait Divers," 86.
Concluding remarks

News, criminologists’ and police narratives on the investigation, the search and the criminalization of El/La Mataviejitas are overwhelmed by incongruities and contradictions. To conclude, I would like to share some of the certainties.

According to Renato Sales, El Mataviejitas “had an accomplice.” According to Bernardo Bátiz, El Mataviejitas “acted alone.” That belief was shared by neuropsychologist Feggy Ostrosky, who concluded after the “results of laboratory analysis” (the only uncertainty here is which kind of analysis) that the “serial killer acted alone.” The Department of Justice of Mexico City created a three-dimensional bust of the Mataviejitas accomplice. Through this knowledge, police were certain that El Mataviejitas had committed suicide.

Regarding the detention of a serial killer, reports stated that “luck” has been the main ally in the detention of serial killers around the world. Similarly, criminologist Martín Barrón stated that “it might even take twenty years” to arrest a serial killer and the detention “happens in a fortuitous manner.” Less than a year later, after the arrest of Juana Barraza, Barrón was certain that the Mataviejitas was captured thanks to good police work and investigation. Luis José Hinojosa, president of the National Centre of Criminalistic research, was certain that the detention of Juana Barraza “was a stroke of good luck and not the result of police investigation.”

306 Fernández, “Es 'Mataviejitas' Brillante.- Bátiz.”
307 Ostrosky, Mentes Asesinas: La Violencia En Tu Cerebro, 186.
309 Brito and Corona, "Atrapan a Mataviejitas, Lleva Lista De Ancianas."
310 Sierra, "Analizan a Seriales De Europa."
311 Padilla and Pérez, "Tarda Hasta 20 Años Captura De Asesinos."
312 Barrón Cruz, El Nudo Del Silencio: Tras La Pista De Una Asesina En Serie, La Mataviejitas.
313 Francisco Reséndiz, "La Detención Por Suerte Y No Por Investigación," Crónica, January 26 2006.
Bernardo Báztz stated on October 2005 that the “Mataviejitas was brilliant and didn’t leave any fingerprints on the crime scenes.” Three months later, when Barraza was arrested Báztz confirmed that Juana Barraza was indeed La Mataviejitas because her “10 fingerprints” had been found in 11 homicides and one failed homicide. In the same press conference, which was only six hours after Barraza’s arrest, Báztz further stated police had determined that the one fingerprint they got from an X-ray, in the failed homicide, was “very similar” to Barraza’s fingerprints. In spite of declaring beforehand that police “had only fragments” of fingerprints as evidence of past homicides, Báztz declared in the press conference that he was certain they had “enough [fragments] as to consider that it was the same person.”

Renato Sales Heredia was certain that “there is a problem in relation to fingerprints. We need in the country a computerized system that allows us to compare fingerprints in a digital manner, given that a manual comparison takes a lot of time.” He further stated that “a database with fingerprints is of little use if they can not establish a relation between the victim and the criminal.”

In the search for El/La Mataviejitas, police were certain that the serial killer was, like any other of his kind, just a “common citizen.” When police arrested Juana Barraza, Margarita Guerra, from the Mexico City Justice Department, was certain that Juana Barraza was not a sociopath. According to academic Isabel Bueno, Juana Barraza is a “sociopath just like Hitler and El Mochaorejas, whose strong personality attracts and fascinates.”

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314 Fernández, "Es 'Mataviejitas' Brillante.- Bátiz."
315 Salgado and Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer."
316 Ibid.
318 Salgado and Servin, "Cae Mataviejitas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer."
319 Salgado, "Del Mataviejitas, 24 De 32 Asesinos: Renato Sales."
320 Heredia, "Seis Visiones En Busca De Un Serial."
321 Padilla and Pérez, "Tarda Hasta 20 Años Captura De Asesinos."
322 Arturo Sierra "Ligan a Luchadores Con 'Mataviejitas'," Reforma 2006.
As Juana Barraza herself asked: why blame her for all the killings of elderly women when police were looking for a man?\textsuperscript{324}

Rather than the police investigation and actual knowledge of \textit{El/La Mataviejitas}, I hope to have shown that it was more the circumstances of Barraza’s detention, the manner in which the sketches and photographs have been presented and interpreted by police and media, and most importantly the merging of \textit{La Dama del Silencio} with \textit{La Mataviejitas} that have criminalized Juana Barraza as \textit{La Mataviejitas}. As stated before, the objective of this work is not to argue for a conspiracy theory against Juana Barraza but to highlight the resources, knowledge, and assumptions that were available to police in the search for \textit{El/La Mataviejitas}.

As such, international accounts of serial killing specifically from the United States and France have largely determined the profile of \textit{El/La Mataviejitas} in Mexico City. However, more so than helping, these assumptions have proven to reinforce an already classist, sexist and racist approach to criminality in Mexico are prevalent since the nineteenth century, which has served delimit the parameters of Mexican national identity for post-colonial Mexicans.

The main research question that has framed this analysis is this: what about Juana Barraza has captured Mexico’s imagination, making her the focus of the headlines across all Mexican newspapers as \textit{La Mataviejitas}? Even at first sight it was obvious that a shift had taken place in representations by media and police from \textit{El} to \textit{La Mataviejitas}, and a fascination with the figure of the wrestler as a serial killer was evident. They offered a research problem that seemed in itself promising. However, the main research question was motivated by the lack of police attention to the more than 400 women killed in Cd. Juárez Mexico, or an even higher number of women being killed as a result of domestic violence in Mexico, or continuous hate crimes against non-normative genders and sexualities in Mexico City, which are mostly unaccounted for. In other words, why has

\textsuperscript{323} Institucional Dirección de Comunicación, “La Mataviejitas:"Una Sociópata", Asegura Académica De La Uía,” (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006).
the killing of older ladies in Mexico City attracted more media and police attention than any other crime?

It is not the numbers of elderly women that seems so exceptionally alarming, considering the escalating number of young mestizo women in Cd. Juárez who have been killed since the 1990s. Nor is it the way elderly women were assassinated, considering the torture, mutilation, and dismembering of women in Cd. Juárez or in El Estado de México (where the Poeta Canibal operated). And it certainly is not about an specific modus operandi, considering that the police have detected a modus operandi for women in Cd. Juárez, for the killings of El Poeta Canibal and for the bodies of tortured and dismembered gay men in Zona Rosa, prey of El Sádico – just to mention recent cases, without considering the killings of narcos and narcosatánicos in Mexico.

Through this research I have found, as I have argued, that it is Juana Barraza who gave media and police the perfect sensationalistic story. Paradoxically, both despite and because of the continuous gender bias of the police, Barraza’s non-normative gender, suspicious sexuality and lower-class status were read as the signs of a serial killer.

The woman-on-woman violence perpetrated by La Mataviejas is not talked about differently from other kinds of violence against women. Violence against women in Mexico has before La Mataviejas become a site of performance, already, more women than in Cd. Juarez die in el Estado de Mexico due to domestic violence. Unfortunately, women being killed in Mexico are not news anymore; it is part of everyday life. After Juana Barraza was arrested and declared La Mataviejas, victims matter only in proportionate relation to how “outside the norm” the killer is perceived to be (but not because of the killings themselves). And from Mexico City, Juana Barraza seems to have transgressed more social norms than any other killer because she is a woman and a wrestler.

324 Salgado and Servin, "Cae Mataviejas Tras Consumar Otro De Sus Crímenes; Es Mujer."
My intent is not to defend Barraza but to point out how the media, police, and criminologists are not demanding responsibility from Barraza for the killing of elderly women but are pathologizing Barraza for her class, ethnicity, and most of all her non-normative gender and wrestling practice. Moreover it is La Dama del Silencio who is being criminalized and not Juana Barraza. When Barraza was arrested, the Mataviejitas case was subsequently closed, suggesting that only one serial killer was responsible for all the killings of elderly women, despite the high number of unresolved cases.

I chose to explore the notion of mexicanidad drawing from criminality because the materialization of such discourses has severe and cruel everyday repercussions in the everyday lives of Mexicans. When bodies fall outside the masculinized ideal of mexicanidad they don’t count and killings go almost unnoticed by media and police despite international pressure. By exploring the relationship between gender, sexuality and criminality in news reports, discourses of criminality and popular culture I hope to have contributed to an understanding of how the intersection of these discourses is intrinsically linked with notions of national identity and their place within cultural and social spheres. The political decisions of authorities and media to consider elderly women homicides as worthy of recognition as opposed to those of homosexuals or young mestizo women in Juárez further criminalizes the bodies of non-normative individuals and renders them invisible.

This is just a brief window onto all the possible research in the intersection between criminality and popular culture that accounts for its relationship to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Cultural studies in Mexico is an underdeveloped field of study that is waiting to be expanded. Many questions in this project call for future research. For instance: is there a relationship between the much greater “global” visibility of Mexico’s disenfranchised (wrestling, Zapatistas, the celebrity status of Marcos himself, Lopez Obrador as legitimate president of Mexico governing from el Zocalo, symbolizing a re-mobilized poor/working-class population) and the increasing global popularity of its “kitsch” machismo?
Figures
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Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure 3
Figure 4
Miradas que matan: tres momentos

La mirada de Barraza al momento de su detención (25-01-06).

La mirada de Barraza el día de su captura (25-01-06).

La mirada de Barraza en su presentación a los medios (25-01-06).

"La mirada fija del psicópata es más un preludio de la autogratificación y del ejercicio del poder que un mero interés o una atención empática."

(Hans; 2003:268)
Figure 7
Appendix

Other sketches used in the search for *El/La Mataviejitas* published in newspapers.
Other sketches used in the search for *El/La Mataviejitas* published in newspapers.

Sketches published in different newspapers the day Barraza was arrested
More sketches of *El/La Mataviejitas* provided by Comandante Moneda, where he explained that more than 99 sketches were created by police with different physiognomies. This is an excerpt from the manual elaborated by French police in Mexico City.
More documents of *El/La Mataviejitas* provided by Comandante Moneda, where he explained the 3 prototypes. This is an excerpt from the manual elaborated by French police in Mexico City.
Image published in different newspapers of Juana Barraza as La Dama del Silencio.
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