

# Mask and Disguise: Dismembering Bodies, Sexuality, and Genre in Hispanic Detective Fiction

## Abstract

Emanating from the USA post-Wall Street Crash, detective fiction's popularity has been interpreted as a consequence of disillusionment and lack of faith in authority. A phenomenon within popular culture, the genre has a great international readership, repeatedly using *noir* tropes such as urban spaces, the *femme fatale*, and the lonesome detective. Towards the end of the Twentieth Century, the genre began to inspire original works by Latin American authors. My research considers to what extent and to what ends the masks of body, sexuality and genre are adapted and mutated through Hispanic crime fiction.



Examples of various U.S hard-boiled detective fiction from the 1940s, which demonstrate the sexualisation of the female form.

## Introduction

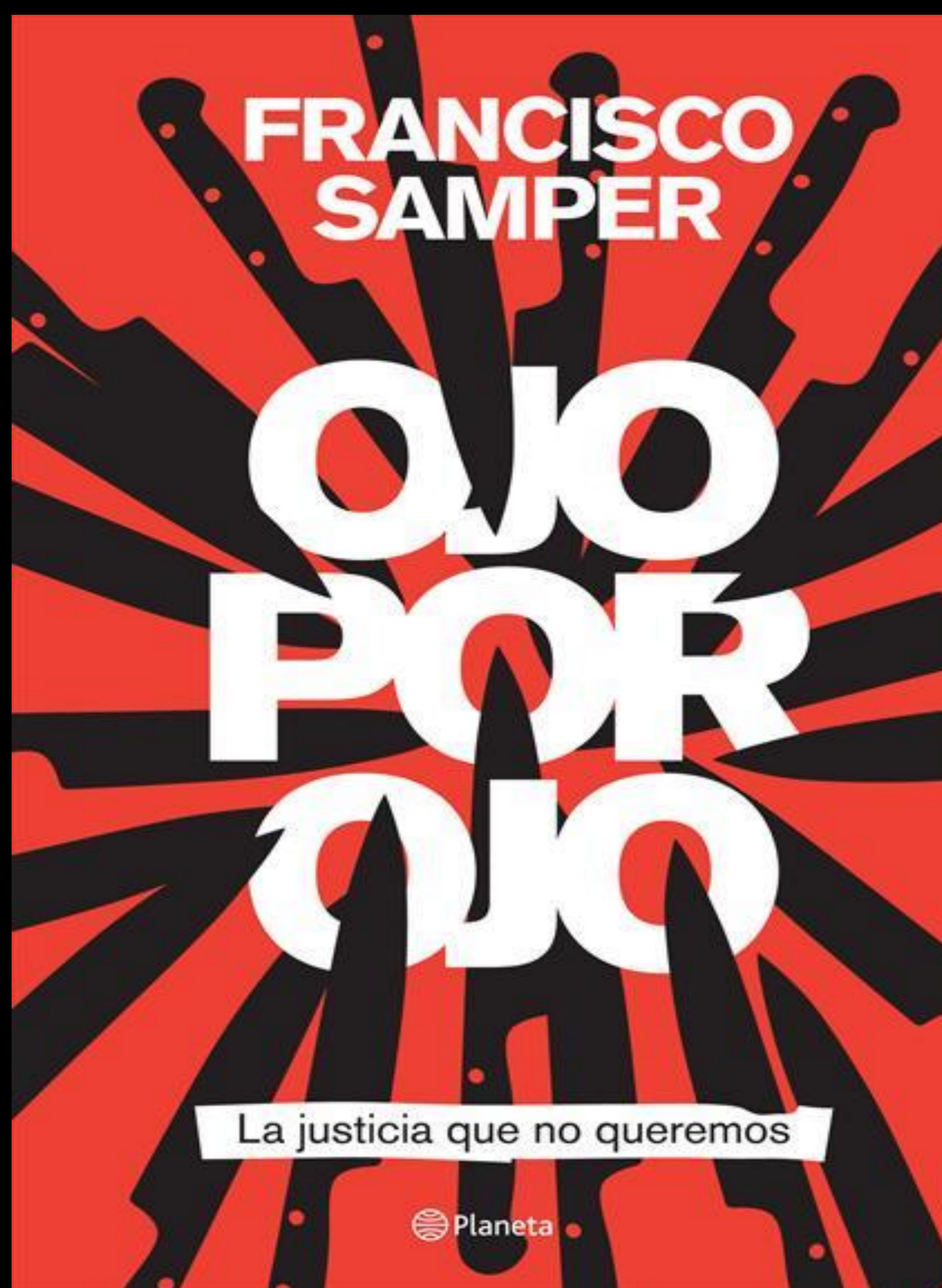
Academic investigation into the field of Hispanic detective fiction generally tends to put great focus on the socio-political meanings behind such texts. Though this is undoubtedly important, my research targets the portrayal of sexuality and gender in such novels, and questions the originality that Mexican and Cuban authors can claim over their work, exposing the masks and disguises that surround gender identities and questioning the very genre of crime fiction itself as produced in two societies which have each experienced great social upheaval towards the middle of the previous century.



LEONARDO  
PADURA  
Máscaras



Cuban author Leonardo Padura Fuentes' *Máscaras* (Tusquets: 2013, cover work by Itziar Guzmán) constitutes a postmodern subversion of the detective genre.



Francisco Samper's *Ojo por ojo*, (Planeta: 2012. Cover by Jorge Garnica). The novel deals with vengeance against violent Mexican cartels.

## Research Questions

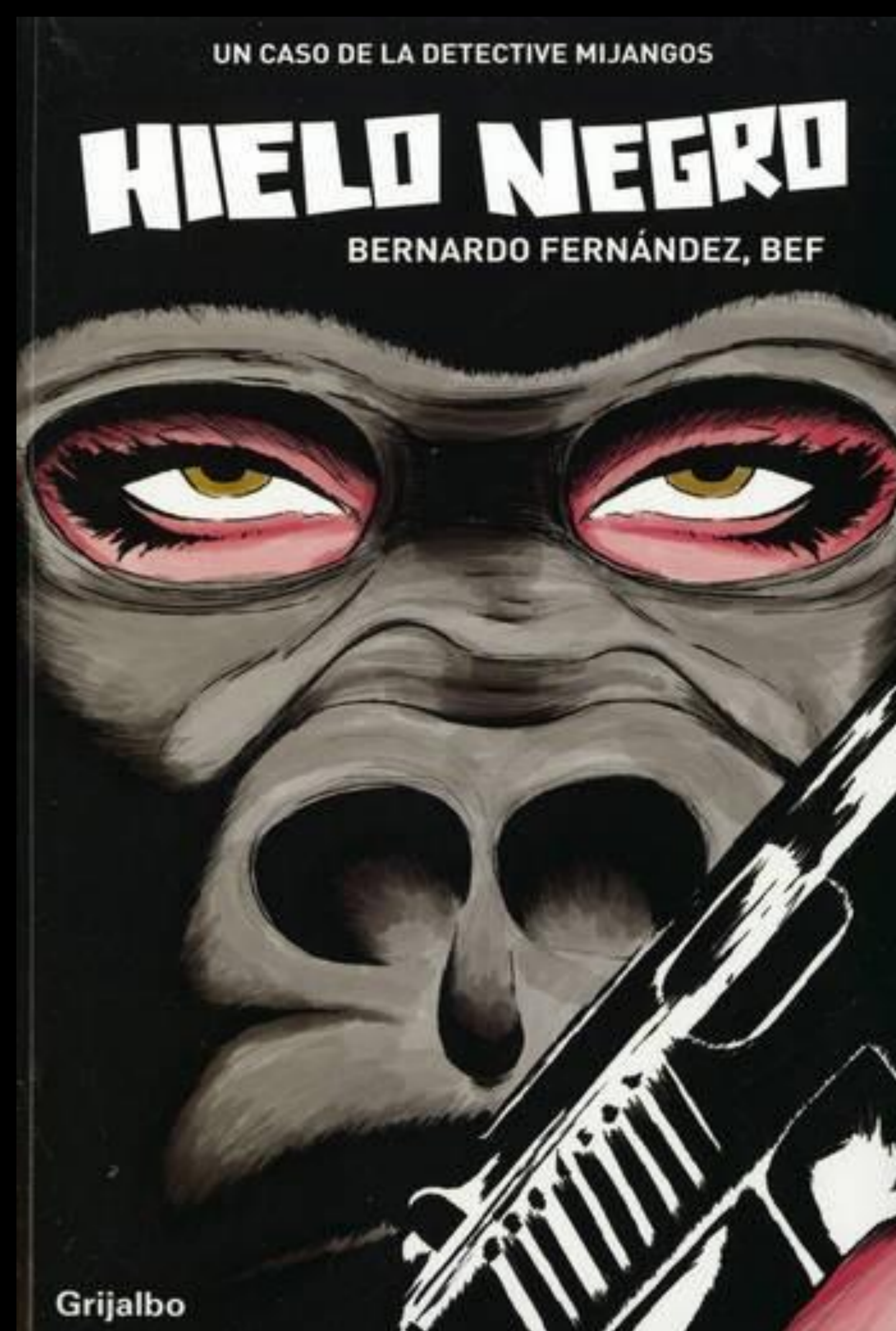
- Do repeated *noir* tropes such as the use of highly sexualised *femme fatale* mean Hispanic detective fiction is merely a copy of North American work, or do authors create original mutations?
- What do authors create by challenging the gender and/or sexuality of the detective protagonist?
- In societies such as Mexico in which women are arguably murdered disproportionately in acts termed *femicide* (murdered for being women), what do authors achieve by writing women's bodies in a highly eroticised yet passive state?



In Mexico the *buchona* is closely associated with the drugs trade and excessive femininity. Depictions of such women have begun to appear in Mexican detective fiction (*Buchonas*, María José Félix Díaz, 2013).



Artwork detailing the links between femininity and criminal acts in Mexico (*Buchonas*, María José Félix Díaz, 2013).



BEF's *Hielo negro* focuses on dangerous women within the Mexican drugs trade (Grijalbo: 2013).

## Preliminary Results

My research hypothesises that Mexican and Cuban detective fiction use literary devices such as masks and disguise, the ubiquity of the gaze, the neo-femme fatale and subversive sexualities in addition to the self-reflexive nature of such fictional texts which question their own procedure, to constitute an original unorthodox mutation from the stringent genre codes U.S. noir fiction. My work acts as proof that Mexican and Cuban detective fiction should, therefore, be analysed in its own right.

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