IN MEMORIAM, IN PRAESENTIA: LA CALAVERA CATRINA AND EMBODIMENT THROUGH A MEXICAN AESTHETIC EXPRESSION OF A SUBCULTURAL GOTHIC FASHION STYLE

Author

Kathryn A. Hardy Bernal, Yoobee College of Creative Innovation, New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence of the alternative fashion-based Gothic and Lolita movement in Mexico, and its development from its Japanese street-style foundations. It investigates its intentions, motivations, symbolism, and intertextual cultural and religious associations, particularly connected with the festivities and rituals of *Día de Los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead. The focus is on the prevalence of the distinctive aesthetics of *La Calavera Catrina* in the Mexican expression of the subcultural Gothic Lolita identity.

The iconic image of a grinning female skeletal character, adorned by a huge, feathered chapeau, is ubiquitous in Mexico. Known as *La Catrina Calavera*, she was created sometime around 1910 by the Mexican political satirist and lithographer, José Guadalupe Posada, and made famous by the radical Mexican artist, Diego Rivera. The figure of Catrina, *la calavera* ("the skull"), has since become a mascot of *Día de Los Muertos*, Day of the Dead. *Día de Los Muertos* is a time of remembrance and celebration of those who have passed to the afterlife, and a chance for the souls of the deceased to revisit their loved ones in the earthly realm. As such, rituals pertain to both the memorial and the presence of the ancestors. Associated with the Catholic feast days of All Saints and All Souls, as well as Hallowe'en, *Día de Los Muertos* has also evolved from pre-Hispanic traditions. The customs of the festival have thus emerged from the syncretism of colonial and indigenous belief systems.

Resonating from this hybrid landscape is the subcultural fashion-based identity of the Mexican Gothic Lolita. While the Mexican incarnation draws from the Japanese model and continues to weave together sartorial sensibilities of the Rococo, Romantic, and Victorian eras, historical mourning dress, twentieth century goth style, and neoromantic, neo-gothic fashion movements, it has also evolved to reflect its own cultural flavour. The Mexican Gothic Lolita style introduces a novel eclectic fusion, influenced by local indigenous, historical, and contemporary sources, and inspired by Mesoamerican, Spanish colonial, Catholic, Gothic, Baroque, and Hispanic iconographies, motifs, and spiritualities.

This unique manifestation of the Gothic Lolita is supported, in Mexico, by an independent, creative, handmade fashion industry, yet to be co-opted into mainstream culture, which lends

itself to the do-it-yourself aspect that enables its individuality to flourish. As such, the Mexican Gothic Lolita transforms and rearranges semiotic elements of the original style to make new statements.

This research stems from my completed doctoral thesis, which utilized ethnographic field studies and surveys, undertaken in Mexico, and online, in order to recognise the contributions of the subculture's participants, to hear their voices, and discuss their inspirations in context. Also explored were the ways in which the Mexican movement reflects, and differs from, the philosophies of the original Japanese movement. This paper addresses some of those aspects, while analysing complex symbolism embedded in the innovative subcultural expression of *La Catrina Lolita*.

Introduction

> The opposition between life and death was not… absolute to the ancient Mexicans…. Life extended into death, and vice versa. Death was not the natural end of life but one phase of an infinite cycle. Life, death, and resurrection were stages of a cosmic process that repeated itself continuously. (Paz, 1961: 54)

On July 23, 2017, I attended a dinner and ball at the Hotel Palacio San Leonardo, Puebla City, Mexico. This event, *El Baile de Las Rosas* ("The Ball of the Roses") was organised by members of a Mexican subcultural fashion-based group, associated with the original Japanese movement known as Gothic and Lolita. The ball, which included a fashion show, highlighted the practice of several Mexican artists and designers working within the Gothic and Lolita genre, showcasing fashion, shoes, jewelry, accessories, and artworks. The foundations of this alternative fashion industry grew out of Japanese street styles of the 1970s to 1980s in Osaka, Harajuku, and Shinjuku, gaining ground in the 1990s, and hitting a peak in the mid-2000s. The distinctive stereotypical silhouette of a Japanese Lolita dress includes a higher waist, and a bell-shaped, or cupcake-shaped, knee-length skirt, supported by layers of petticoats. Overall, the impression is cute and doll-like. Since the latter years of the 2010s, however, the movement has been growing increasingly spectacular in Mexico. With this migration, styles have become "Mexicanized", and elements and motifs of historical Spanish, Hispanic, and traditional Mexican sartorial design have been introduced to create new genres of the alternative Gothic and Lolita identity. This paper focusses on just one of the Mexican innovations of the Gothic Lolita style with the emergence of the Catrina Lolita image, in connection with *Día de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), and figures of 'Lady Death.' Specifically, it explores and analyses intertextual layers of sociocultural meaning embedded in this image, revealing deeper philosophies, statements, and traditional, indigenous, and contemporary beliefs. Out of this fusion, is the embodiment of Death *and* Life, memory and presence. The aim is to illustrate how, with the migration into the Mexican environment, the subcultural Gothic and Lolita style has developed a new cultural flavor and psychology, demonstrating semiotic and symbolic shifts through its iconology.

Literature Review

My visits to Mexico over the last decade were to undertake field studies and primary ethnographic research towards my Doctor of Philosophy qualification, of which this paper is derived. My completed doctoral thesis, *Lolita Latina: An examination of Gothic and Lolita style in the Mexican environment* (2020), investigates the cultural conditions of Mexico as a repository for the evolution of the subcultural Japanese Gothic and Lolita fashion-based movement, its style, and meanings. Furthermore, it analyses how the Mexican Gothic and Lolita style illustrates an inherent "Mexicanness", reflecting a Mexican psyche, especially in association with culture, history, identity, gender, and religion. Progressing from my Master of Philosophy study, *The Lolita Complex: A Japanese fashion subculture and its paradoxes* (2011), which examined complex sociocultural and psychological issues in relation to the phenomenon in Japan, my doctoral research explored a departure, in Mexico, from understandings of the movement's foundations and intentions. This current paper is based on focal points of my postgraduate studies but also introduces new, and previously unpublished, primary material and examples.

As this paper stems from two major postgraduate theses, supported by many years of reading and research, there is not sufficient space or scope, here, for a comprehensive literature review. For extensive analyses and syntheses of primary and secondary source materials, therefore, the reader may refer to the original theses (Hardy Bernal, 2020; 2011). However, it is relevant to note that, at least prior to the submission of the doctoral research, as far as could be determined, there were no other specialised studies of the "Mexicanization" of the Japanese Gothic and Lolita style. While online access to my thesis may have since led to further interest in the topic, this aspect highlighted one of the gaps in pre-existing literature and created an opportunity for my unique contribution to the research field. It also meant that the major resources for this study were, and are, comprised of my primary research data, obtained via surveys, interviews, conversations, observations, and participation. My methods of collecting, collating, and analysing the information will be elaborated on in the following section on methodology.

In order to establish frameworks for my primary research, and to substantiate my critical analyses and opinions from a contextual, culturally valid perspective, I continue to consult relevant historical and contemporary resources on Mexican society, religion, and national identity, especially in association with philosophies of spirituality, and Life and Death. Some of the most reputable traditional viewpoints are expressed by Octavio Paz (1961, 1976, 1985) and Jacques Lafaye (1976), supported by contemporary academic researchers, including Enrique Ajuria Ibarra (2014, 2018), and Antonio Alcalá González (2014, 2018). Others will be referenced throughout the body of this paper. These scholars refer to and explain Mexico's colonization and its influences on the formulation of the Mexican psyche, which, they maintain, builds upon anxieties caused by episodes of bloodshed, conquest, and displacement.

Enrique Ajuria Ibarra (2018) states that the memory of Mexico's past is both repressed, due to the "struggle of a silenced and troubled identity", [and]… "glossed over, by a biased, if not inadequate, view of the events of the conquest and colonial eras", while "the colonial past is… still manifested in the present" (239). Similarly, Rubén Gallo (2004) describes the city of

Mexico as a “space where the Aztec past coexists… with a postmodern present, where Western culture lives side-by-side with [indigenous] traditions…, and… pre-Columbian culture thrives among the chaos of the modern city” (Alcalá González, 2014, pp. 536-537). “The past is right there,” writes Antonio Alcalá González (2014), “right in front of the city’s inhabitants” (537). He continues: “Nevertheless, this past… is almost forgotten and left to rot behind modern glass and steel” (Alcalá González, 2014, pp. 537).

> [In Mexico, we] live in our time, but… among ghosts from preceding ages, and omens of those to come…. [B]eing a mixed race of Spanish-speaking people, Mexicans are… of remarkably evident pre-Columbian roots who have postponed or expelled a reencounter with their past…. (Alcalá González, 2014, pp. 537)

Mexico is haunted by the spectre of its bloody historical past: the pre-Columbian practice of human sacrifice; in turn, the massacre of indigenous peoples by the Spanish conquerors; and, essentially, the devastation and genocide of peoples and civilizations. Anxieties are thus associated with racial ambiguity and hybridity, and connected with spiritual and religious assimilation, achieved by the processes of iconoclasm and syncretism.

The syncretist mindset of the Mexican people is deeply ingrained, as it even preceded the Spanish invasion and the establishment of New Spain. Octavio Paz (1985) writes:

> The version of Western civilization that reached Mexico was also syncretist…. Catholic syncretism… assimilated Greco-Latin antiquity… [and then there] was Spanish syncretism. Centuries of struggle with Islam had permeated the religious conscience of Spaniards; the notion of the crusade and holy war is Christian but also deeply Moslem…. When Bernal Díaz del Castillo saw the temples of Tenochtitlán [Mexico City], he spoke of “mosques.” For him… the Indians were “the others” and the others were pre-eminently Moslems…. The Spaniards knocked down the statues of the gods, destroyed the temples, burned the codices, and annihilated the priestly caste. It was as though they had removed the eyes, ears, soul, and memory of the indigenous people. (345-346)

Paz (1961) also emphasizes that when the Spanish conquerors arrived in Central America, the Aztecs were only the latest inhabitants of the land (89). They, too, had conquered, colonized, destroyed, and absorbed preceding civilizations. As such, “differing traditions and cultural heritages” had already been appropriated (Paz, 1961, p. 91). Therefore, as Paz (1985) reiterates, Mexican religion is a syncretic faith that was formulated not only by a fusion of late-medieval Roman Catholicism and Aztec beliefs but by a cultural assimilation of their own foundations. This hybrid syncretism has “come down to our own day” in the form of a Mexican “collective consciousness” (Paz, 1976, pp. x-xi).

Methodology

This hybrid construction of what it means to be Mexican, is an integral framework for analysing the evolution of the subcultural Gothic and Lolita genre in Mexico. In regard to the design and styling of the Mexican Gothic Lolita identity, I argue that this context is immediately apparent via critical observation and semiotic readings of sartorial elements and motifs. However, to give this concept weight, it has been imperative to seek evidence from the participants, themselves, and hear their authentic voices.

This study has been largely constructed around primary research, which has included surveys, interviews, personal correspondence, observation, and participation, online and in person, during my visits to Mexico City and Puebla City, Mexico. Originally, although Mexico was planned as my focal case study, I was investigating the migration of the Gothic and Lolita movement into Latin-American cultures overall, and the cultural shifts that have occurred as a result. I, therefore, distributed questionnaires to members of Gothic and Lolita communities in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, of which I received 120 completions. Forty of them, one-third, came from Mexico. It was through this process that I realized Mexico's unique position, which is what led me to concentrate on the Mexican movement.

The methods I have used to undertake my research pertain to the "insider/outsider" approach to ethnographic studies. This brings me to my status as an insider/outsider researcher. While my critical research introduces new and previously unexplored territory to the wider research field, I have been associated with the subcultural movement as a member and participant, myself, since 2003.

Paul Hodkinson (2002) validated this methodology with his groundbreaking study of the British goth subculture as an insider/outsider participant/researcher. He evaluated the position of an academic researcher from the perspective of a critical insider, maintaining that "a point of difference was created, as soon as [he]… adopted the role of social researcher" (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 4). Rhoda MacRae (2007) points out that "whatever the extent of [one's]… initial proximity or distance, critical reflexivity is vital for understanding and making explicit the full implications of one's position" (51). Hodkinson (2002) emphasizes, however, that it was his insider identity, as a goth, that gave him an edge of authority, highlighting that it "would be mistaken… to assume… that all researchers would somehow [be]… equally well-positioned to study goths" (5). In fact, his insider status allowed him much easier accessibility and evaluation of the research data.

Hodkinson (2002) explains:

> As well as having practical value for gaining access to respondents, participation in the goth scene was key to understanding the experiences and meanings of those involved… and formed the basis of a more distanced, critical form of observation and analysis…. [It was] crucial to gaining a thorough picture, rather than being overly reliant upon accounts of interviewees. (5)

Regarding this approach, MacRae (2007) writes:

> Ethnographic studies – including some where the researcher has initial proximity to the respondent group – are… popular method[s] in attempting to understand how… people may construct their identities…. The principle of seeking access to insider knowledge and experience – and attempting to immerse oneself within a given culture in order to achieve this – is… a widely practiced approach to social research. (52)

Figure 1. Gothic Lolitas in Mexico (Kathryn Hardy Bernal is seated second in from far right), (23 July 2017), *El Baile de Las Rosas* (The Ball of the Roses), Hotel Palacio San Leonardo, Ciudad de Puebla, México

My own research has been enhanced by this form of methodology. As a member of the international Gothic and Lolita community, and my acceptance by other participants, I have gained insider access, which has led to a better framework for critical analysis. My involvement has included field trips to both Japan, where the Gothic and Lolita subculture originated, and to Mexico, where I was welcomed and included in membership events. On a particular visit to Puebla City, I was able to meet some of my correspondents and questionnaire respondents in person (Figure 1). I also had the opportunity to be introduced to even more members who had not been part of my original surveys but whose opinions and contributions are continually invaluable. This paper cites some of those perspectives.

La Calavera Catrina

> The Mexican… is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it…. [D]eath is not hidden away…. Death is present in our fiestas, our games, our loves, and our thoughts…. Sugar-candy skulls, and tissue-paper skulls, and skeletons strung with fireworks…. We decorate our houses with death's heads, [and] we eat bread in the shape of bones on the Day of the Dead…. [The Mexican] praises [death]… cultivates it, embraces it…. [R]elations[hips] with death are intimate. (Paz, 1961: 57-59)

The focus of this paper, the identity of *La Catrina Lolita*, is just one of the innovations of the fashion-based Gothic and Lolita movement in Mexico. It has been chosen as the emphasis, here, as it is one of the most iconic in terms of the Mexicanization of the original subcultural style. *La Catrina Lolita* resonates with Mexico's cultural landscape, reflecting the locality's history, society, and spirituality, via an aesthetic fusion that draws from local indigenous, colonial, medieval, and contemporary motifs, and beliefs, especially in relation to rituals of Life and Death. As Paz (1961) has stated, the Mexican environment is framed by its cult of death, which is also a celebration of life, memorialized during *Día de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), a phenomenon connected with Mexico's hybrid form of religiosity, a syncretism of pre-Colonial and Catholic beliefs, of customs inherited from the Mesoamericans, the Aztecs and the Spanish, and inseparable from the Mexican being. Associated with *Día de Los Muertos* is *La Catrina Lolita*, an alternative identity of the Mexican Gothic Lolita, and an embodiment of the figure of *La Calavera Catrina*, who is often referred to as 'Lady Death.' Before analysing the subcultural fashion style, it is necessary to examine the framework for its inspiration.

The appearance of the Gothic Catrina Lolita is influenced by the Mexican cultural figure, *La Calavera Catrina*. This character was first created in about 1910 by the Mexican political artist, engraver, and lithographer, José Guadalupe Posada, as part of a series of satirical *calaveras* ("skulls") (Figure 2). The image of *La Calavera Catrina* displays a grinning skull wearing an extravagant feathered chapeau. According to Christine Delsol (2011), this caricaturized representation of "a high-society lady as a skeleton wearing only a fancy French-style hat [signals] a sort of satirical obituary for the privileged class." She was originally named *La Calavera Garbancera* to reference people who were ashamed of their indigenous roots and preferred to adopt French customs. In other words, the figure was a dig at those who chose to dress like members of the European bourgeoisie in order to reject their indigenous identities. She thus served as an indication to the people of Mexico that they should respect and embrace their history and heritage. As *garbanzo* literally means "chickpea", and a *garbanzera* is a chickpea farmer/vendor, she is, therefore, dressed up as something she is not. In this sense, she was originally intended as a vulgar, derogatory character to be reviled.

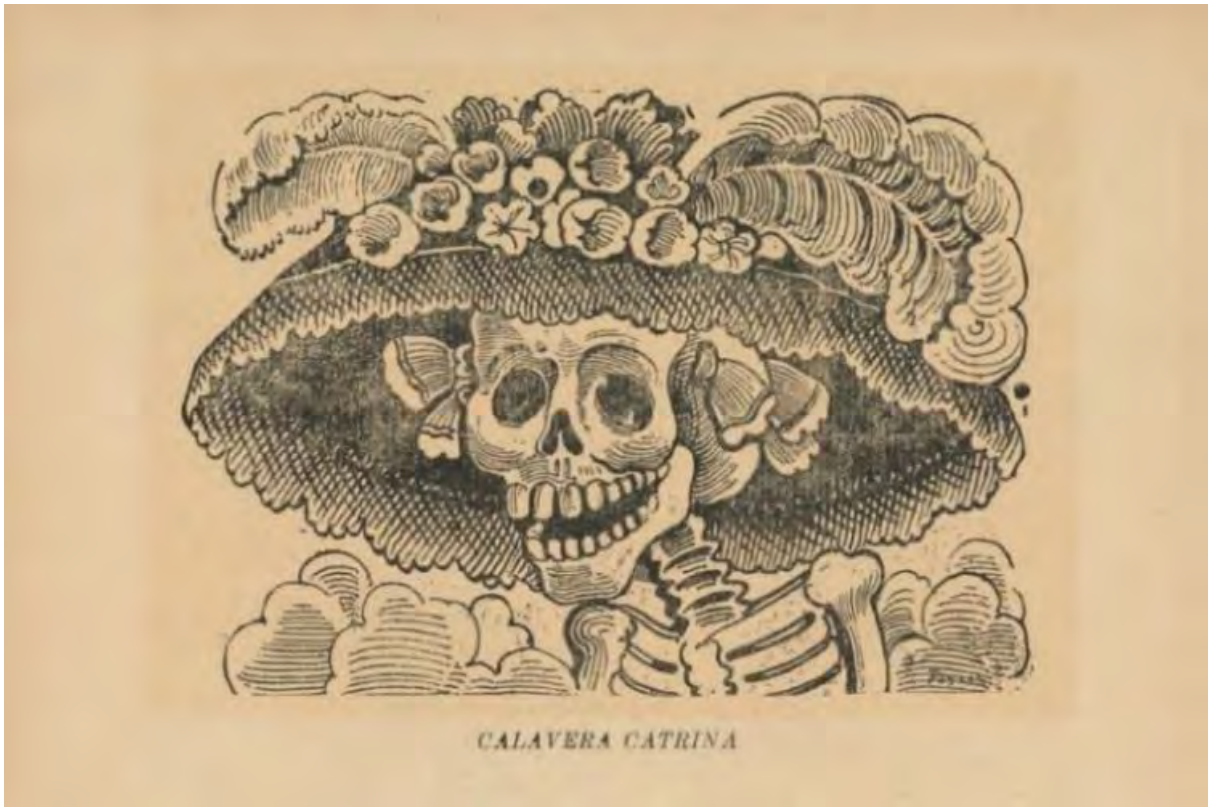


Figure 2. José Guadalupe Posada (c. 1910), *La Calavera Catrina* [etching]

In 1948, the symbolism of *La Catrina* shifted when she was depicted by the renowned Mexican artist, Diego Rivera, as a central figure in his panoramic mural, *Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical en La Alameda Central* (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Central) (Figures 3 and 4). The setting for Rivera's 50-foot mural is Alameda Central Park, which was built over the ruins of an Aztec marketplace. The site is chosen as a reminder of the destruction of indigenous civilization, art and culture. It represents references to the Spanish conquest, the fight for independence, and the Mexican revolution. In the center of the picture is Rivera's wife, the extraordinary painter, Frida Kahlo. She is holding the Eastern yin-yang symbol, which, according to Doris Maria-Reina Bravo (2010), operates as an equivalent motif for the dual principle of pre-Columbian religious philosophy. It can also be seen as symbolic of the dual ancestry of the Mexican people. Kahlo is standing behind a self-portrait of Rivera who is depicted as a ten-year-old boy. She has a hand on his shoulder, which is seen by Bravo (2010) as a sign of her protective affection. Bravo (2010) adds:

> [Y]in and yang refer to opposite yet interdependent forces, like day and night…. This concept is perhaps the most fundamental duality… female ("yin") and male ("yang")…. [T]his Chinese symbol becomes a metaphor for Rivera and Kahlo's complex relationship.

However, the young Rivera is also holding the hand of the skeletal figure of Catrina, as if she is his mother. In my opinion, this seemingly maternal relationship between Catrina and the boy is accentuated by her clothing style, which is not of the 1940s, when the mural was painted,

but of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, contemporary with the artist's youth, and fitting with popular theories that the painting relates to childhood memories. Apparently, Rivera thought very highly of Posada and his work, and, in the Alameda mural, he honored the artist with a prominent position: he is the well-dressed, albeit disgruntled gentleman offering his arm to Catrina. These are all interesting gestures as, although Catrina originally symbolized a disrespected type of character, she is treated here with respect. The way I read this is that, while she is supposedly dressed as a crass, ostentatious, pompous member of the urban European middle classes, she is also reduced to a skeleton, demonstrating that, underneath, "we are all the same", and that Death comes to us all. She is, therefore, an emblem of tragedy, a consequence of the colonization, occupation, struggle, and death of her people, the indigenous Mexicans.

Figure 3. Diego Rivera (1947-1948), *Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical en La Alameda Central* (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central) [mural]

Figure 4. Diego Rivera (1947-1948), *Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical en La Alameda Central* (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central) [mural, detail]

Figure 5. Kathryn Hardy Bernal (24 July 2017), *La Catrina Calavera* ceramic figure, Avenida 2 Oriente 206, Ciudad de Puebla, México

As David de la Torre highlights, however, the Mexican concept of Woman as Death was not invented by Posada (Delsol, 2011). The image precedes Posada's series of *calaveras*, and has been reiterated, in Mexico, throughout time, from the Mesoamerican era, onwards. In fact, he states that Posada's Catrina was inspired by the Aztec goddess of death, Mictlancíhuatl, Lady of Mictlán, the underworld (Delsol, 2011). This is suggested by an iconographic reading of Rivera's depiction of Catrina. First of all, and most obviously, her skeletal form links her to Mictlancíhuatl, but she also evokes the Aztec earth mother, Cōātlīcue, who is often represented as a skull and adorned with snakes. This is signified by the feather boa around her neck, which is more like a rattlesnake, and is symbolic of the Aztec plumed-serpent god, Quetzalcóatl, who was the son of Cōātlīcue (Figure 4). As earth goddess and death goddess, *La Calavera Catrina* is, therefore, a dual motif for both Life and Death, and a fitting mascot for *Día de Los Muertos.*

Día de Los Muertos

In Mexico, at all times of the year, images, figurines, and panoramic displays of *La Calavera Catrina* abound, from cheap souvenirs to exquisite artefacts, such as the *talavera* ceramic version I photographed in a shop window, in Puebla City (Figure 5). However, it is especially in regard to her relationship with *Día de Los Muertos* that she is recognized as a national symbol. Delsol (2011) writes that, as she is associated with Mictlancíhuatl, the "keeper of the bones of the underworld", Catrina is also attached to historical month-long Aztec festivals, which celebrated and honored the dead, over which "Lady Death" presided. Delsol (2011) explains that, "[w]ith Christian beliefs superimposed on the ancient rituals, those celebrations have evolved into today's Day of the Dead."

Figure 6. Mexican cemetery during *Día de Los Muertos*

Día de Los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, is a time of remembrance and celebration of those who have passed, as well as a chance for the souls of the deceased to revisit and dwell in the presence of the living. Festivities include the decoration of graves, gatherings, and fiestas at burial sites, and the creation of shrines and altars of offerings to ancestors, family, and loved ones (Figures 6 and 18). Stanley Brandes (1997) claims that this "ritualistic elaborate" festival of death stems from the memorialization "of the enormous loss of life during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," suffered during the colonization of Mexico (289). The modern Day of the Dead also demonstrates that many pre-Colonial customs and ceremonies were not as easily wiped out. Many argue that while it is aligned with the Roman Catholic days of All Saints and All Souls (November 1-2), and coincides with Hallowe'en (October 31), *Día de Los Muertos* is rooted in pre-Hispanic, even Mesoamerican, customs (Brandes, 1997; Childs & Altman, 1982; Lafaye, 1976; Paz, 1961, 1985; Reyes-Cortez, 2012; Sonntag, 1995). According to Robert V. Childs and Patricia B. Altman (1982):

> The beliefs and practices associated with contemporary observances of *Día de Los Muertos*, although not a direct and simple survival of pre-Hispanic ritual, have their roots in the ancient religions of Mesoamerica…. However successful the Spanish Church may have been in the destruction of state cults, it is apparent, on close scrutiny, that much [of the] "Catholicism" of contemporary… communities is pre-Hispanic in origin, especially the beliefs and customs related to death and the dead. (6-7)

Brandes (1997) states that, "perhaps more than any other single Mexican ritual, [the Day of the Dead] is… believed to be either a… pre-conquest… survival with a European Catholic veneer or a near-seamless fusion of pre-conquest and Roman Catholic practices" (274). Mexican anthropologist, Marcel Reyes-Cortez (2012), maintains that:

> Mexico's religious and funerary practices, introduced from Spain during the Spanish conquest, both clashed and fused with existing customs, creating complex and elaborate social rituals and systems…, [and] practices, and the establishment of the contemporary landscapes and spaces dedicated to the dead. (121)

And Sabrina Sonntag (1995) clarifies that, while *Día de Los Muertos* incorporates Catholic feast days, "the missionaries' ideas came to coexist with, rather than supplant, existing indigenous beliefs" (50).

Emerging from this hybrid, syncretic sensibility is the Mexican innovation of *La Catrina Lolita*, an alternative style of the subcultural fashion-based Gothic Lolita identity.

La Catrina Lolita

The fashion-based subcultural identity of *La Catrina Lolita* fuses multiple layers of inspiration: the silhouette of the original Japanese Gothic and Lolita style, combined with its distinguishing Rococo, Romantic, and Victorian design features, and elements of historical European

mourning dress, are superimposed with Hispanic sartorial details, pre-Hispanic, indigenous motifs, and the iconography of *La Calavera Catrina*.

Figure 7. Edwin Gongora (2016), Sunako (Mérida, Yucatán)

Figure 8. Sunako (Mérida, Yucatán) (2018)

One of the examples of this innovation that I initially came across was this image from 2016, demonstrating the eclectic style of Yazmín Pool (Mérida, Yucatán), who calls herself Sunako (note that nicknames are chosen by most participants featured in this paper as part of their subcultural Gothic and Lolita personae) (Figure 7). A couple of years later, another version of Sunako as *La Catrina Lolita* appeared (Figure 8). In the first instance, she wears a Catrina-like chapeau, enhanced by a long, black mourning veil (Figure 7), while, in the second image, she substitutes the hat for a veiled headdress that harks back to historical regal hoods, or reticulated headdresses, of early Spanish colonial times (sixteenth century) (Figure 8). Sunako's Lolita silhouette is provided by full skirts, of which the first is by the Japanese Gothic and Lolita fashion brand, Bodyline (Figure 7). Although her blouse is also in-keeping with the popular styles of the original Japanese movement, she has chosen one that evokes a sense of Spanish/Hispanic dress with its frills and flounces (Figures 7 and 8).

The aspect that most conspicuously lends the earlier ensemble its Mexican look, and undoubtedly references *La Catrina*, is the face makeup (Figure 7). This skull-like makeup is linked to *Día de Los Muertos* in a few ways: It reminds us of the festival's mascot, the grinning *calavera*, Catrina; as well as Mexican *calavera* imagery, in general; and, also, other historical lady figures of death, such as the Aztec Mictlancíhuatl, Queen of the Underworld. Furthermore, it mimics the appearance of sugar skulls, created especially for the occasion (Figure 9). These beautifully decorated skulls may be edible, made of sugar or pastry, or may come in more

permanent forms, such as wood, plastic, or ceramics, and sold all year round. The application of this sugar-skull type of makeup is prolific around the time of the festival by many, not just the Gothic and Lolita community. However, when married with the subcultural Lolita silhouette, and elements of Gothic fashion, such as black mourning veils, it contributes to the materialization of the Mexican Catrina Lolita.

Figure 9. Adriana Pérez de Legaspi (2010), *Calaveras de dulce* (“sugar skulls”)

In Sunako’s second version, she adds a lace face covering, which also cleverly imitates the appearance of a decorated white sugar skull (Figures 8 and 9). Her description of this photograph declares, “Happy Halloween!! Today there is a festival at school, and what is better than a Catrina outfit like every year?” Besides Catrina, however, Sunako’s ensemble alludes to yet another prominent female figure in Mexico, the nation’s ultimate icon, The Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe (Figures 8, 10, and 11), merging her motifs with Catrina’s, and contributing even more complex layers of meaning. This further fuses indigenous religious sources with elements of Mexican Catholicism, symbolizing the syncretic basis of Mexican faith, which is reflected by the customs and rituals of *Día de Los Muertos.*

Adorning Sunako’s headdress is a wreath of red roses (Figure 8). In ancient Roman times, the rose was a symbol of triumphant love and the emblem of Venus, the Goddess of Love (Ferguson, 1976, p. 37). With the development of Roman Catholicism, the motif was transferred from the Goddess to Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The subsequent reference to Mary as a “rose without thorns”, applies to her immaculate, untainted state (Ferguson, 1976, p. 37). Sarah Carr-Gomm (1995) writes that “[i]n chivalrous imagery, rose gardens… surround a maiden, its thorns protecting her chastity” (190). Mary is thus attached to the white rose and its association with purity, while “in Christian symbolism, the red rose is a symbol of martyrdom” (Ferguson, 1976, p. 37). The petals of the red rose evoke the passion of Christ and stand for his blood and wounds (Carr-Gomm, 1995, p. 190). They are, therefore, relevant to Our Lady’s suffering.

Here, in Sunako's headdress, we have a garland of them (Figure 8), which, "[i]n Renaissance art… is often an allusion to the rosary of the Blessed Virgin" (Ferguson, 1976, p. 38). In fact, rose-red, the color, is linked to Our Lady, the Virgin, in Mexico, where it retains the sensibilities of its foundational meaning of Love connected with the ancient Goddess. Rose-red, the original color of Our Lady of Guadalupe's robe (now faded to pink), symbolizes "martyrdom for the faith and divine love" (Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, n.d.) (Figures 10 and 11).

Visions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, believed to be an incarnation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, are said to have been witnessed in Mexico, on several occasions, during the early Spanish colonial period. Pertaining to these apparitions, is the "Miracle of the Roses". As the story goes, when the bishop, Fr. Juan Zumárraga, asked Juan Diego for evidence that he had met Our Lady, she instructed the man to go to the top of Tepeyac Hill, on the outskirts of Mexico City, to collect some flowers. This, Our Lady said, would prove the encounter. Diego was surprised to find blooms that were not native to the land, of a type he had never seen before. Besides, the hill was rocky, and the soil was not viable for growth. It is said that the flowers were Castilian roses, a kind that the Spanish-born Zumárraga had sorely missed. Diego carried the flowers in his tilma, a traditional, indigenous robe woven from hemp. As he stood before the bishop, the man unfolded his tilma, whereby the roses tumbled to the ground. In their place, imprinted on Diego's garment, a miraculous image of Our Lady suddenly materialized as a likeness of a venerated effigy located in Guadalupe, Spain. This very image is trusted to be one that hangs, framed, to this day, at the altar of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Mexico City, after being cut out from Diego's tilma, many centuries ago (Figure 10). In art, her omnipresent image is often encircled by an abundance of roses, in relation to this event (Figure 11).

The Marian symbolism of Sunako's headdress, afforded by the red roses, is accentuated by spikes that radiate like the sunrays surrounding Our Lady of Guadalupe (this feature is not obvious in this particular photograph, which has been chosen to highlight the facial details) (Figures 8, 10 & 11). These spikes have clear tips that look like water droplets, or teardrops. This also relates to the Virgin as Our Lady of Sorrows (another particular type of depiction of Mary, which is also prolific in Mexico).

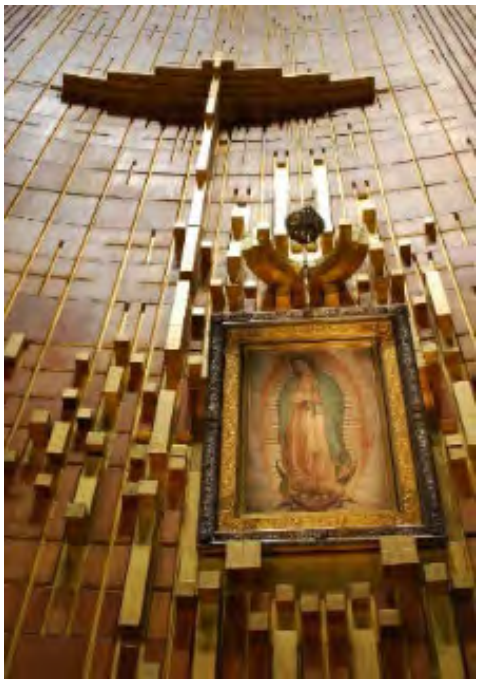


Figure 10. The Miraculous Image, Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine, Mexico City

Figure 11. Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexican Prayer Card

Another floral motif connected with both Our Lady of Guadalupe and *La Calavera Catrina* is the cempasúchil, or Mexican marigold. This golden-orange flower appears in this example of *La Catrina Lolita* by Briz Blossom (Guadalajara, Jalisco) (Figure 12). In a caption to this image, she explains:

> In November we celebrate, in Mexico, the Day of the Dead. We honor our beloved people that passed away and we dress as the Death, called “Catrina”. I’m also wearing traditional Mexican orange flowers called cempasúchils.

Figure 12. Briz Blossom (Guadalajara, Jalisco) (2016)

This floral emblem of *Día de Los Muertos*, the cempasúchil, also known as the zempoalxóchitl, cempasúchitl, or the *flor de muerto* (“flower of death”), again demonstrates pre-Hispanic and Catholic ideas. As the *flor de muerto*, it is linked with figures of Lady Death but also by name to Our Lady: “Marigold” (Mary gold), comes from the tradition of offering marigold flowers to the Virgin Mary as a substitute for gold coins. Before the worship of Our Lady in Mexico, however, the cempasúchil, which is native to the land, and had been cultivated there since ancient times, had already held great meaning for the Aztecs. According to Suzanne Barbezat (2017), its “vibrant color is said to represent the sun, which in Aztec mythology guides the spirits on their way to the Underworld.” As such, it has gained its place of importance during the festival of *Día de Los Muertos*, an occasion when deceased ancestors and loved ones are remembered but also when their spirits are said to return. The cempasúchil’s radiant color and strong aroma are believed to attract and guide the souls of the departed back to the present, following the scattered petals, or full blooms, as a pathway to their earthly graves, altars of offerings, and memorial shrines (Figures 6 and 18). Sonntag (1995) highlights that this flower has been connected with the ceremonies “since pre-Hispanic times… to honor the gods and to revere the dead” (54).

The cempasúchil also unites *La Calavera Catrina* with the Aztec snake-goddess, Cihuacóatl, of whom the flower signifies. It is said that:

> To the Southeast of ancient Tenochtitlán there was a temple called Tlillancalco, “house of darkness or blackness”, dedicated to Cihuacóatl, snake-goddess mother, patron deity of cihuateteas, women who have died in childbirth, which, according to Aztec mythology, retained the sun from midday until sunset. This temple was adorned with cempoalxóchil flowers… of reddish yellow color and an intense and pleasant balsamic smell. (Inicio Enciclopedia, n.d.)

In this relationship with the Mother and the Sun the cempasúchil is again linked to Our Mother, Mary, in that Our Lady of Guadalupe is framed by the golden rays of the sun (Figures 10 and 11).

The cempasúchil also features in the next example of the Catrina Lolita style, worn by Yami Yuki Ai (Atlixco, Puebla) (Figure 13). Yami has captioned this image, *La Muerte* ("The Death"). Dressed from head to toe in mourning black, Yami wears her own Gothic Lolita ensemble, designed and constructed by herself, for her Mexican Gothic and Lolita fashion label, Bara no Yami. Her outfit, which incorporates the classic Lolita silhouette, includes a black mourning veil, a cross pendant, and skeleton-print tights. She adds skull-like makeup and holds a cempasúchil as if to lure and guide the spirits. Yami's pose and the composition of this image also present her as a gothic bride, or the Bride of Death.

Figure 13. "*La Muerte*, Yami Yuki Ai (Atlixco, Puebla) (2018)

Lady Death, as represented by the Mexican artist, Diego Rivera, is personified in the following image of Briz Blossom (Figures 4 and 14). Here, Briz embodies Rivera's Catrina, while still carrying an essence of the Gothic and Lolita style. Obvious references to the artist's original image are the large hat, white dress, and sugar-skull makeup, alluding to the grinning *calavera*. There is even an air of *La Catrina's* French bourgeois countenance, in her stance, and by the addition of the frilled parasol and handbag. However, her dress is not a direct copy, especially the silhouette. It fuses an idea of Catrina's historical garment with the bell-shaped skirt of Lolita, albeit lengthened to the ground. The cemetery setting relates it even more closely to *Día de Los Muertos*, and lady figures of death culture.

Figure 14. Alberto Prieto Ortega (2014), *La Catrina*, Briz Blossom (Guadalajara, Jalisco)

Figure 15. Briz Blossom at *Catrinas Lolitas: Día de Muertos Lolita y Boystyle CDMX* (2018) Hotel Geneve, Ciudad de México

The true, classic Lolita dress shape is exemplified in a later interpretation of *La Catrina Lolita*, in regard to Briz's outfit for a Gothic and Lolita membership event, *Catrinas Lolitas: Día de Muertos*, hosted by the *Lolita y Boystyle CDMX* community, and held at the Hotel Geneve, in Mexico City, on 27 October 2018 (Figure 15). Here, she has combined immaculate sugar-skull makeup with a Catrina-like feathered chapeau, and an exquisite dress of the exemplary Japanese Gothic and Lolita fashion brand, Angelic Pretty, to create her Mexican Gothic Lolita Catrina identity.

In another photograph from the event (not pictured), Briz is sitting with two other attendees, Michael Valle (Manzanillo, Colima) and Jane Baphy (Villa de Alvarez, Colima). Michael, wearing skull-like makeup, skeleton gloves, and a large top hat decorated with a plumed sugar skull, evokes the unnamed skeletal male groom of Catrina, who is often depicted alongside her. Jane's outfit also embodies *La Catrina Lolita*, again bringing together the classic Lolita silhouette with Catrina motifs. Her mantilla-style veiled headdress, however, introduces yet another layer, with its traditional Spanish/Hispanic sensibility (Figure 16). The star-shaped coronet adds both a regal and religious touch, connoting Our Lady of Guadalupe as Queen of the Sun and Heavens, in connection with her sunburst surround, and her star-spattered cloak (Figures 10, 11, & 16). Jane's sugar-skull makeup, skeleton tights, and a tiny jeweled-skull detail at the base of her radiating coronet, unite Our Lady of Guadalupe with *La Calavera Catrina*, Lady Death. The presence of these two figures is symbolized in the posy that Briz

holds, which contains the cempasúchil, a motif of both the Virgin Mary and Catrina, as well as Marian red roses.

In 2018, Soley de Lioncourt (Mexico City) also styled herself and her young niece in matching Gothic Lolita outfits (Figure 17). Here, the little girl holds a carry case that merges two cultures. It is shaped as a guitar, referencing Spanish heritage, and topped by a stylized Aztec-type skull. They both wear classic Gothic Lolita garments of the typical silhouette in mourning black, with skull-like makeup, crosses, and wreaths of red roses. Appropriately, Soley has captioned this photo “We are born alone, live alone, die alone. Everything in between is a gift.”

Figure 16. Jane Baphy at *Catrinas Lolitas: Día de Muertos Lolita y Boystyle CDMX* (2018) Hotel Geneve, Ciudad de México

Figure 17. Soley de Lioncourt and her niece (2018)

The following image is of Alexa Fernanda Deras Barraza (Torreón, Coahuila) (Figure 18). Here, she is dressed in a Lolita-style garment but without the signature petticoats, creating more of a goth image, rather than the typical silhouette of the Gothic and Lolita identity. However, she retains the essence of Lady Death in her mourning attire, which includes a classic black dress, fascinator, and cameo brooch, accentuated by sugar-skull makeup, and skeleton gloves. Her shoes are by the Japanese Gothic and Lolita brand, Bodyline. Her tribute to the dearly departed is emphasized by the setting, as she stands in front of a family altar of offerings for loved ones who have passed on to the afterlife.

In the next composition, Gloria D’l Pilar Cantú (Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas) displays her Catrina Lolita look in a cemetery to coincide with *Día de Los Muertos* (Figure 19). Gloria is wearing a nun-like Gothic Lolita dress, consistently popular with Mexican Gothic and Lolita

participants. The model, titled *Nameless Poem*, is by Ista Mori, a Chinese Lolita brand. The Catholic spirit of this garment is reiterated by Gloria's cross pendant, the crosses in her sugar-skull makeup, and her red-rose head wreath, which adorns her Victorian-style Lolita bonnet. As discussed, rose garlands are associated with the Virgin Mary. However, floral coronets, in general, hold an extra layer of meaning, relevant to this ensemble. According to Kirstin Kennedy (2018), "floral headdresses… [recall] the elaborate crowns studded with artificial flowers worn by Mexican nuns at the moment of their profession, and on their death beds" (166). Added to this headdress are strings of pearls, which are also a Marian reference, as they symbolize purity, perfection, innocence, modesty, and chastity. Again, therefore, we witness the fusion of Catholicism with indigenous concepts.

Figure 18. Alexa Fernanda Deras Barraza (Torreón, Coahuila)

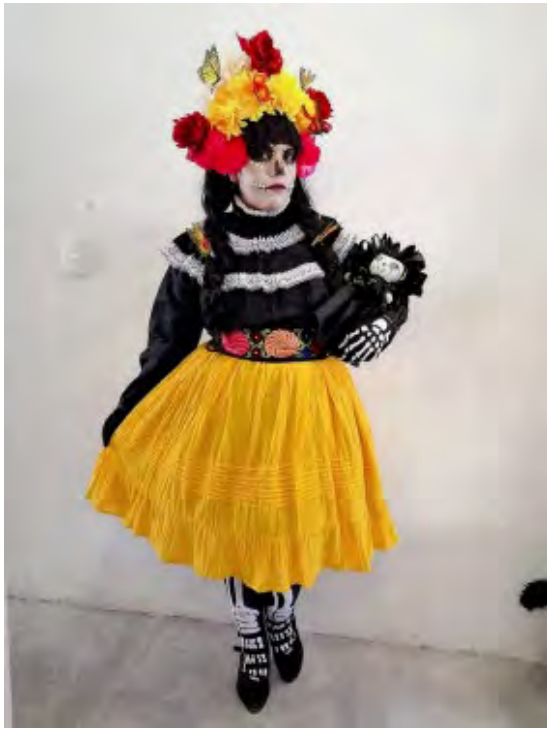
Figure 19. Gloria D'l Pilar Cantú (Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas) (2018)

One of the most motivated and influential participants of the subcultural Mexican Gothic and Lolita movement, and especially the Mexicanization of the identity and style, is Ineray (Monterrey, Nuevo León). She is also one of my most valued correspondents. She has recently provided me with more background into her intentions and inspirations, which extend beyond the conceptualization of *La Catrina Lolita*. Here, though, I concentrate on just a few examples of her many Mexicanized versions of Gothic and Lolita styles that fit with this current paper's theme.

In the first instance, Ineray (2019) is holding a type of ragdoll, handmade by indigenous Mexican people, called a María (Figure 20). As María dolls are traditionally believed to ward off evil spirits, this is a thoughtful accompaniment to an outfit created for *Día de Los Muertos*, a time when spirits are said to return to the earthly realm. Ineray's hair is decorated with roses and native cempasúchils, both floral emblems of the festival, and connected with the syncretism of Catholic and indigenous beliefs, uniting the motifs of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady

of Death. *Mariposas monarcas* (“Monarch butterflies”), which are strewn through the floral arrangement, are also a symbol associated with the ritual celebrations, as they are believed to be the souls of departed ancestors. Of this image, she states (2022):

> I think this is the Catrina Lolita outfit that I’m most proud of because the skirt, the Mazahua blouse, and the belt are all indigenous Mexican garments. It would be easier to coordinate items made by Lolita dedicated brands, but my intention is to try to incorporate these unusual local items. This is for two reasons: The first and main one is to show that you can wear Lolita with items that you may already have or that are not as expensive as branded items; and the second is to showcase beautiful pieces that are made by indigenous people in Mexico. (personal communication)



Ineray (Monterrey, Nuevo León)

Figure 20: (2019); Figure 21: (2021)

In the next example, Ineray (2021) wears a Hallowe’en themed dress by the Mexican designer Fernanda Súarez for her Gothic and Lolita fashion brand, Pinkutomidori (Figure 21). Ineray styles it over a traditional Mexican embroidered blouse and includes sugar-skull makeup and a floral wreath headdress full of *mariposas*. About this, she says (2022):

> I put this outfit together last year for a panel I created about Catrina makeup for a virtual J-fashion event where I actually talked about how bad I am at makeup and tried to demonstrate how to use premade Catrina makeup stickers. As you can see, they don’t look that great, so my advice would be to learn how to do at least very

> simple makeup, in order to achieve the skull look needed for the Catrina style. (personal communication)

In 2020, Ineray wore designs by two other Mexican designers (Figure 22). The blouse is by Yami Yuki Ai (Atlixco, Puebla) for her Bara no Yami brand, and the skirt, *Lilith*, is by Yessica Lavin (Mexico City) for her label, Atelier Dulcinea. Ineray (2022) says that her main goal was to showcase the fashion garments by the Mexican designers, so she added a half-face Catrina makeup look using rhinestones to create a Mexican flavor.

Figures 22, 23, 24, & 25: Ineray (Monterrey, Nuevo León) (2020)

In another ensemble from the same year, Ineray's intention was to honor the artist, José Guadalupe Posada, with a look that more closely draws from *La Calavera Catrina* (Figures 2 and 23). Again, Ineray promotes local Gothic and Lolita fashion design with a dress by Claudia

Baez (Puebla) for her label, Puppets; and shoes of the *Sigrid* model by Diana Valmont (Guanajuato) for her brand, Fredja. The colour palette also recognizes Diego Rivera's Catrina (Figures 3 and 4), and simultaneously creates a "*shiro gosurori*" ("white Gothic Lolita") image, a subcategory of the Japanese subcultural identity, which conventionally includes white face-makeup, substituted, in this instance, by skull-like makeup, merging the Japanese Shiro Lolita identity with the Mexican Catrina Lolita. In Ineray's (2022) description of this outfit, she explained: "I wanted to go back to the roots of the Catrina, and chose a shiro style in order to focus on the black and white idea of the cartoon origin of this Mexican icon."

In the next photograph, Ineray displays her representation of something quite different (Figure 24). Here, she is influenced by the concept of the Japanese *ouji* ('prince') style, popular as a fashion choice for male, female, and gender fluid members of Gothic and Lolita communities. This elegant, unisex look is also referred to within the subculture as Boystyle. However, Ineray has again Mexicanized her ensemble by combining this framework with not only symbols of the *calavera* but also sartorial elements of the *charro.* A *charro* is a Mexican cowboy, or horserider, who wears a traditional form of dress, which includes a large hat, the *sombrero de charro*, and performs and competes in *charreadas*, or rodeos. Of this, Ineray (2022) stated to me: "For this Charro Catrina look, I wanted to try an Ouji with a Mexican twist, so I used a buff scarf with a Mexican sugar-skull print to skip my usual makeup disaster."

For the following ensemble, this time, an interpretation of an *escaramuza*, a female version of the *charrería* (the equestrian discipline of the *charreadas*), Ineray incorporated a rhinestone half-facemask in order to avoid her unconfident application of Catrina style makeup (Figure 25). The *sombrero de la escaramuza* also cleverly mimics the iconic chapeau of *La Calavera Catrina*. Once again, we see a multilayered fusion of the Catrina motif with complex references to Mexican history and culture and the distinctive silhouette of the original subcultural Japanese Lolita style. According to Ineray (2022), regarding her motivations, overall, she states:

> To summarize, I am always inspired to try to add some Mexican flavor to my [Gothic and Lolita] outfits. It is who I am, after all. I am far from the ideal of what the Lolita style originated from. I will never be a slim Asian beauty, and I will never be white. I am a brown-skinned woman. Mexicans are a mixture of indigenous native Americans, Europeans, and African black people, and the Catrina concept also combines the syncretism of Roman Catholic and indigenous traditions with a sprinkle of sugar and cartoon jokes by José Guadalupe Posada. So, I embrace all of that, and I am happy that, although the use of Catrina makeup and symbolism has seeped into mainstream society, fairly recently, it is a pretty concept to be linked to us, as Mexicans.

Conclusion

The examples of *La Catrina Lolita*, discussed in this paper, are just a small selection of sartorial innovations by members of Mexican Gothic and Lolita Communities. Although, all are inspired by the figure of *La Calavera Catrina*, participants, in constructing their ensembles, generate images compatible with their individual identities, injecting their own personalities into their alternative styles, and applying local Mexican motifs to the silhouette of Lolita fashions. While some looks are designed, handmade, bought, reworked, and or styled specifically for the occasion of *Día de Los Muertos*, others represent the application of skull-like makeup and addition of skeleton tights to pieces from their everyday Gothic and Lolita wardrobes in order to give a Mexicanized edge to their subcultural identities. As declared by Briz Blossom (2018), in a response to the essence of the festival, "When Catholicism and 'Paganism' join together, this is Mexican culture." This could also be said of the Mexican subcultural fashion style of *La Catrina Lolita.*

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