

Graduate Program in Translation  
College of Humanities  
University of Puerto Rico

Thesis

*We Are All Superbarrio*

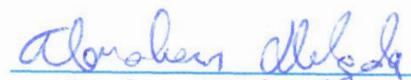
(A translation of excerpts from *Todos somos Superbarrio*, by Mauricio-José Schwarz)

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February 2018



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# Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to the librarians from the Gerardo Sellés Solá library at the College of Education, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. Not only did you give me work at the library when I was studying toward my B.A., but also you helped me with any problem I had during that time and afterward. When I was going to quit my M.A., you helped in convincing me to stay. This is dedicated to Marisol, Raúl, Zulma, Glory, Nati, Héctor, and Jeanmary.

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# Preface

## Preface

Who is Superbarrio? In order to fulfill the thesis requirement for completion of my Master's degree from the Graduate Program in Translation at the University of Puerto Rico, I have decided to answer this question by translating sections of the book *Todos Somos Superbarrio* by Mauricio-José Schwarz. This text recounts the story of a man who dressed up as a masked professional wrestler in order to defend the rights of the poor and marginalized in Mexico City. He fought alongside the grassroots organization Asamblea de Barrios, which was known for the creative ways in which it promoted social issues. The narrative reflects a crucial period in Mexican history from the 1980s and early 1990s, which was marked by a devastating earthquake, government injustice, the greed of landlords, the defense of housing for the economically marginalized communities in Mexico City, as well as the prominent role which professional wrestling, or *lucha libre*, assumed during this time.

The idea of Superbarrio figured on my mind while I was working on my thesis. A new administration came into power in Puerto Rico that has enacted labor reform, which directly affects the new workforce; there was a three-month-long university strike; and there was a call for an audit that never happened on government spending that never happened. What really brought the subject to my mind was the chaos that occurred after Hurricane Maria, and how the lives of everyone on the island were utterly transformed while recovery proceeds at a snail-like pace because of a tragic mix of corruption, lack of emergency planning, and the failing electrical grid. This is without taking into account the change of discourse in United States politics thanks to the Trump administration and the perpetuating fear that eventually something awful is going to happen.

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More than once I wished for a masked avenger to appear to defend the rights of students and Puerto Ricans. I also wished that a masked wrestler might face off against representations of PREPA (Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority) or Trump inside a ring located in the middle of San Juan's financial district, the Milla de Oro. I wished for a group like the Asamblea de Barrios to go into the streets with very original ideas to promote and defend social causes. This is a very important text for anyone who feels disenfranchised and without representation, and in the midst of the turmoil we are living through on the island, this is a text that I believe can speak to all of us. Little did I know that when I accepted the challenge to translate this text it would become so identifiable.

The idea for my thesis topic came to me as a suggestion from an anonymous person on Reddit. I wanted to translate a text about one of my passions, a subject that possibly has not been explored at the Graduate Program in Translation: professional wrestling. Most of the books on the subject are in English, so I decided to see if there were any texts which detailed a part of Mexican professional wrestling history, known as *lucha libre*, or at least the biographies of such famed wrestlers as El Santo or Blue Demon. My search initially took me to many online resources including Mexican wrestling websites, and I even contacted the most important pro-wrestling organizations in Mexico, CMLL and AAA. Most of the texts I found, however, were either too expensive or out of print, and I considered choosing another subject, until Reddit and Superbarrio appeared from the ether in a moment of desperation. I asked on Reddit about books on the subject, and an anonymous person told me about *Todos Somos Superbarrio*, which he called a "mix of pro wrestling with *V for Vendetta*."

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After the suggestion, I went to Google and found the book posted for free on one of the author's blogs. The reason for this is explained on that post: "*A solicitud de varios investigadores y periodistas que me han pedido el material como fuente para sus trabajos, y porque Superbarrio debe ser un mito perdurable de lo mejor de las luchas sociales y en particular del movimiento urbano popular de la Ciudad de México, es un gusto especial poner a disposición de todos en licencia Creative Commons esta historia*" (Schwarz).

I began reading the text one Sunday morning, and I finished it that same afternoon. It was a fascinating story of a man who defended the housing rights of the poor and disenfranchised in Mexico City. Half the book is taken up by the author explaining the crucial parts of the story and the other half is Superbarrio telling the story in his own words, the latter being the more interesting due to the legend that emerged about him and the community organization known as the Asamblea de Barrios. This is a man who initially existed in anonymity, aside from a few friends and the author of the biography. Superbarrio came to worldwide fame, in large part due to his defense of the poor, and eventually began participating in other movements. He was always eager to help his community, to the point of creating his own radio station and purchasing a vehicle specifically to provide transportation to those in need, the Barriomovil, which became famous not only for its owner but also the loud salsa music that would blare from its open windows.

It should be noted that this man was not acting alone, but that he was part of the organization called the Asamblea de Barrios. This is not only Superbarrio's story, but theirs too, since the superhero was also their creation. The Asamblea was established

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after the earthquake of 1985 as a grassroots organization to protect the rights of those who suffered the most from this catastrophe. They gained fame not only for the assistance they offered, but for also the extremely creative ways in which they focused attention on a cause.

After finishing the book, I knew that I had my thesis. I wrote to the author asking for permission that same night, and the author gave me his approval by midnight. I was already on my way.

This text was perfect for me to translate since it included one of my passions (professional wrestling) intertwined with the struggle for a social cause. It is a story that seems to have been drawn directly from fantasy, yet it is real. It covers social movements, contemporary folklore, humor, and, ultimately, social progress, while also appealing to my rebellious side and my love for a good story. Most importantly, right now it feels like something the world needs. Since I was so affected by the narrative and the people involved, I believed I could do it the justice as it deserves. As Rosario Ferré has observed about her own bicultural background: “Only a writer who has experienced the historical fabric, the inventory of moral and cultural existence embedded in a given language, and being Puerto Rican, has enabled me to acquire knowledge of both Spanish and English, of the Latin American and of the North American way of life” (Ferré). I believe that my own experience of living between cultures will greatly assist in bringing this story to a new audience.

Even more important, the text relates a small, relatively unknown part of the history of social movements in Mexico, which I feel is quite unique and worthy of sharing with a broader audience. Who knows if Superbarrio’s story will inspire someone

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in the future to make changes in his or her own country by sheer determination and ingenuity? This shows how creativity and producing a dynamic image can definitely help a social cause move forward.

Superbarrio's story was written by Mauricio-José Schwarz, a writer, journalist, and photographer. His website is highly inventive and it provides descriptions of his interests and achievements, which also extend to other areas. As he states in his online bio:

He dividido mi atención entre la narrativa, la música, la fotografía, el periodismo, la divulgación de la ciencia y la comunicación audiovisual, además de trabajar en la traducción, la difusión del trabajo de otros creadores artísticos de varias disciplinas y la búsqueda de un mundo más justo con gente más libre.” (Schwarz)

Schwarz is the only journalist to forge a close relationship with the man behind the mask and the people who know him. On his “Nota a la edición electrónica” of the text, he states that this is the work in which he has the greatest pride since it deals so extensively with the ideals that he has always believed in. Besides writing *Todos Somos Superbarrio*, Schwarz has various blogs detailing his work, in addition to a very active presence on the main social media platforms where he discusses a range of topics of social concern with people from around the world. Schwarz's reaction to contemporary events, such as the independence vote in Catalonia, as evidenced in related discussions, reveals that he is a man who is not afraid of sharing his ideas about the world—his own ideology— or freely discussing such topics with people who disagree with him. Seeing how he writes and expresses himself in such venues has enabled me to have a better idea of where *Todos Somos Superbarrio* came from and why it is such a compelling story.

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For the purpose of this thesis, I translated all of chapter 1 and sections of chapters 2 and 3. The reason for this division is to provide a coherent narrative despite the fact that I am not translating the complete text. The translation includes Superbarrio's origins, his first community-based works, and his branching out into other social movements.

Chapter 1 begins with a gripping, almost surreal account of how Superbarrio entered a meeting of the Asamblea de Representantes in Mexico City, even though steps were taken to bar him from entering. The chapter continues retrospectively with the story of Superbarrio's financially impoverished childhood and the specific events that led him to become the masked superhero. The narrator describes this process as being suddenly blinded by a light. Once the light had gone, he found himself wearing the Superbarrio outfit. Not only does this chapter include the masked hero's origin story, it also tells the tale of the massive earthquake that shocked Mexico City on September 19, 1985. It goes on to recount what happened to the city residents and the reactions of the government and the media, ending with a description of Superbarrio's response to the catastrophe.

Chapter 2 relates how Superbarrio mobilizes to defend the rights of the poor with the cry of "Contra los caseros voraces ...y las autoridades corruptas" (Schwarz). The narrator relates how Superbarrio has his own "Batsignal," involving the use of fireworks, to announce when an eviction is taking place. The hero arrives at the scene and, with full knowledge of the housing laws, tries to negotiate with the landlord to let the people being evicted remain in their homes. On many occasions deals are made, although sometimes the police are called in. The negotiations, however, are almost always non-violent in nature. Sometimes Superbarrio defends the landlord if he finds that he or she is being abused, which shows that he is only in favor of the evictee when it is merited. Mexico

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City's troubled history with providing decent housing for the financially disenfranchised is discussed here.

Chapter 3 offers an account of Superbarrio's move to other social causes as a result of his popularity. This section begins with a description of protests at the offices of the Fondo Nacional de Habitaciones Populares, which ended up with Citibank being forced to close for the day. The protesters joined forces with the street vendors in the Iztapalapa sector of the city, with the Asamblea de Barrios and Superbarrio threatening that if their demands were not met, they would take off their pants. For the Asamblea de Barrios, and its own superhero, anyone who lives in the city and is being treated unjustly would be supported by the community. This meant that Superbarrio was slowly appearing throughout the city at the defense of different groups that were being treated unfairly. Other interesting interventions include an event in the campaign to spread information about AIDS, when he literally wrestles with a depiction of the virus in the middle of the street. The Asamblea de Barrios would set up a wrestling ring, and the masked wrestler would face off against representations/representatives of different social causes. The pro-wrestling aspect is particularly interesting since it is generally understood that the outcome of any match is predetermined, yet Superbarrio and the author discuss these events as real fights with real people.

This text challenged my abilities as a translator and let me put into practice the knowledge I have gained from the classes that touched on the topics of both cultural and legal translation. The most difficult challenges were the following: 1) the translation of names of organizations and political movements; 2) being careful to not confuse the different narrative voices or use the same language for the two narrators; 3)

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colloquialisms, regionalisms and culturally related terminology from Mexico; 4) choosing between domestication or foreignization depending on the context.

At first, the problem of the number of political movements, parties, and grassroots organizations was overwhelming. Even though I researched all of them through search engines and the university databases, I could not find the translation for a lot of them, especially the grassroots organizations. The first thing I did was to translate the government organizations since most of them have either an equivalent in English or a direct translation. Something that was useful was to look for articles in English that dealt specifically with those organizations and see how newspapers and official documents approached the translation. In the cases that I found more than one translation, I went with the most repeated one and I asked professor Auerbach for advice about which one to use. For grassroots organization it was harder. I decided to keep those in Spanish and explain them in English. I decided to leave the main organization that appears in the text, the Asamblea de Barrios, as it is. My job is to introduce these organizations to the English-reading public, so I think explicitation is a good solution.

In the text I had to deal with two voices: the author's and Superbarrio's. The two narratives are in constant juxtaposition and the way to tell them apart is that Superbarrio's voice is in italics. Two distinct voices entail two distinct ways of speaking. Here is an example of the author:

La sola imagen del enmascarado, lo llamativo de las mallas rojas y el calzón amarillo bastaría para atraer la atención. Ha bastado, de hecho. Pero sin el discurso del que es capaz, no lograría conservar esa atención, encaminarla hacia las exigencias de diversos grupos (Schwarz).

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And here is Superbarrio:

*Entonces negociamos el valor de la renta y quedó como en 300 mil pesos viejos. Cuando el propietario aceptó que ya se hiciera contrato también le empezó a subir. O sea: “Bueno pero que me dé tres meses por adelantado.” Y yo decía: “¿Lo quiere arreglar o no? Mire lo más fácil es que nosotros hacemos un contrato, metemos a la familia, lo sacamos a usted a madrazos y nos amparamos legalmente de que tenemos un contrato.” Y él decía: “Si pero me van a falsificar mi firma.” Y entonces yo le explicaba: “Mientras se resuelve si son peras o son manzanas usted se va a quedar sin renta y sin casa. Y lo primero es que usted nos compruebe que es el propietario.” Fue una fuerte discusión (Schwarz).*

One is formal register, the other is very colloquial. Any Spanish-language reader can even discern the country of origin by simply reading the above fragment. My goal was not only to keep the voices intact, but also to keep the voice in Superbarrio’s section sounding like an interview. I tried to keep the spirit of Superbarrio’s sociolect, and I even left a couple of words in Spanish that are very colloquial or regional. I admit that in my first draft I was often too colloquial for the good of the text, but I was able to make some adjustments by rereading it, and with the advice of professor Auerbach.

Superbarrio’s story is something that can happen only in Mexico City, and, as already noted, the text has its fair share of colloquial words and phrases. There are words, like *cuate*, *granaderos*, and *lanzainquilinos*, for which a direct translation would not have the same effect. I decided to create a glossary to explain some words of this nature, which are found in Superbarrio’s segments. There are phrases like *ya valió gorros* and *bájale de*

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*huevitos*, which, while sounding inventive and amusing in Spanish, would eventually take up too much of the text to be comprehensible in English. I was careful about what to leave in Spanish because I do not want my readers to be going back and forth to the glossary. My ultimate aim was to have the text read as smoothly as possible while at the same time maintaining an authentic Mexican “feel.” What I did with phrases of this nature was to look for an equivalent in English that would make narrative sense and then adapted it. In the cases where I really could not understand the word in Spanish, I contacted friends who live in Mexico City to confirm that I understood what was being said.

Since this is a text concerning a man who dressed up as a professional wrestler, there are professional wrestling segments that include the related jargon. As a lifelong professional wrestling fan, these segments were the most fun for me and I think that the places where I had the least trouble. One thing that was suggested by professor Auerbach, and which I did not think about at first, was to leave the term of the sport as *lucha libre*, without translating it. The reason is that the term *lucha libre*, while it is used worldwide, English-speaking professional wrestling fans use it to talk specifically about Mexican professional wrestling.

The next step was to translate the jargon. For example, two of the terms discussed include *rudos* and *técnicos*. In pro-wrestling parlance, a *rudo* is the bad guy, the pro wrestler who fights against the good guy, who is the *técnico*. In English, the *rudo* is called a “heel” and the *técnico* a “babyface” or “face.” Such wrestling parlance does not have any apparent rhyme or reason since it was largely created in the 1930s as a kind of code aimed at concealing the predetermined nature of the sport. Although everyone

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nowadays is aware of how professional wrestling operates, this coded language still persists and is discussed among fans. Another difficult aspect involves the names of various wrestling moves. In this case, I contacted a lucha libre fan from the United States to confirm that I had translated these correctly. There are also references to classic match situations, like hair vs mask, where the loser either loses the mask or gets shaved bald.

Another challenge involves real estate terminology. Since Superbarrio is the defender of the poor and his metamorphosis began with Mexico City's housing situation, there is an abundance of real estate terminology which I had to research in order to make sure that I was using the correct term. I have little expertise in this field, so I had to look for a United States real estate dictionary to assist me in this quest. It is my hope that the results are successful. The only term that I decided to leave in Spanish is *lanzainquilinos*. There is no equivalent for this word in English since in the United States "movers" are the ones who remove items from a given property in case of an eviction. In this text, *lanzainquilinos* are more like either paid policemen or thugs known for their violence. To me, the word *lanzainquilinos* shows the fury of what was really happening in the evictions and what the Asamblea de Barrios had to fight against. Given the evident violence of the term, I decided to leave it as it is.

The whole translation process can be traced to my first semester "Introduction to Translation" class, specifically the issue concerning foreignization and domestication. For Venuti, foreignization is "an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti). This means that to foreignize a text one needs to keep elements of the source text. For a text such as this one—which is very specific to its time, place, and

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history—I decided to partly employ this approach. Furthermore, the translation should ultimately be acceptable to and respectful of the community that it represents, as Venuti observes in “Translation, Community, Utopia.” I don’t want this to simply be read by my thesis committee, but to be heard by audiences that need to hear this story. I read Dalton Collins’ essay on the history of translation theory and African history to understand some of the translational approaches used in other countries and other texts. John Milton’s essay was also very instrumental in detailing the different type of foreignization approaches that can occur and how one can make a mistake while having good intentions, which only ends up confusing the readers. These texts were key at the beginning and at the revision of the text.

Since the text is very specific, I did not touch the elements of Mexican culture. When it comes to cultural elements, I conveyed the ideas as best I could, even using explicitation at certain junctures. Another process I thought about was Superbarrio’s own register. It is very conversational and colloquial, and his segments are where I really want the reader to recognize them as coming from a person from a very distinct cultural context. I hope that I was successful in translating these sections so that they register as coming from the mind and mouth of this unique Mexican man. I did not play with the syntax or try to reinvent the wheel, but if a word or expression needed to remain in Spanish because I was unable to find something that would perfectly describe it to the reader, I left it as it is, and created a glossary.

This was a long journey that started with the idea of a fun text that quickly became a reality that I wished existed in Puerto Rico. It does not really matter what happens, or what country I end up living in, whenever there is trouble, I will probably

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think about the idea of Superbarrio. There are superheroes, but Batman—who is, of course, fictional—would never protest alongside me for fairer labor reform. Superman would never be able to punch a category-five hurricane in the face and he would not be helping people fix their roofs. Captain America might punch Hitler in the face, but he would not do the same to either a United States president or a Puerto Rican governor. Superbarrio is the hero that the poor and the forgotten deserve, and I hope that with this translation his legend may live on. What is perhaps even more powerful about Superbarrio is that, at the end of the day, he has a mask, and he can be any one of us.

# Glossary

## Glossary

This is a list of words and concepts that are found in the text. They explain areas of the city, government agencies, and concepts or terminology relating to lucha libre/professional wrestling.

**Ángel de la Independencia:** The Angel of Independence, also known as the Monument to Independence. It was created to commemorate the centennial of the beginning of the war for Mexico's independence.

**Babyface or face:** The good guy in professional wrestling. He never cheats and is technically better than his opponent.

**Charro:** Traditional horseman in Mexico. In the text it is used to refer to a person who is attempting to deceive people.

**Chemo or cementero:** Drug user who sniffs industrial-strength glue.

**Compañero:** Partner, colleague, comrade.

**Colonia:** A neighborhood or district in Mexican cities, which generally has no jurisdictional autonomy or representation.

**Coyote:** The person who smuggles someone into a country. In the text it is used to refer to the powerless using a *coyote* to talk to someone in power.

**Cuate:** Depends on the context. It can mean either "guy" or "my friend." Both can be used in a negative or positive manner. From Nahuatl "coatl," meaning twin or serpent.

**Éxodo de Tabasco:** March for Democracy in Tabasco. Protests in Tabasco after the 1994 elections. There were accusations of voter fraud by the PRI government because of voting machines not working correctly.

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**Finishing move:** In professional wrestling, this is the move that a wrestler uses to end the match. It is a move that he or she always uses and is identifiable with the character that he or she is conveying.

**Fonhapo:** Fondo Nacional de Habitaciones Populares, Low Income Housing Fund in English. Government organization in charge of creating affordable housing and distributing it to people that need it.

**Fovissste:** Fondo de la Vivienda del Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado, Housing Fund of the State Workers Social Security and Services Institute in English. Government agency that grants credit for housing to government workers.

**Granaderos:** A police squad specializing in crowd control and street protests.

**Gusano de Manzana, jefes de manzana:** A play on words. “Manzana” is apple or city block. A “jefe de manzana” is a block leader. The wrestler called “Gusano de Manzana” conveys the idea that there is a worm in the apple and that it cannot be eaten.

**Hacienda de Los Morales:** Land where white mulberry was planted for the growth of silkworms in the sixteenth century. It went from this to a residential unit to finally becoming a restaurant.

**Heel:** The bad guy in professional wrestling. He always cheats by doing things behind the referees’ back.

**Hernán Cortés:** Spanish conquistador and explorer who defeated the Aztec empire and claimed Mexico for Spain.

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**Imeca:** Índice Metropolitano de la Calidad del Aire, Metropolitan Index of Air Quality in English. It is the reference value system for the levels of air pollution in Mexico City. (Also a play on words in the text.)

**Infonavit:** Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda, National Workers Housing Fund Institute in English. Mexican federal institute for workers' housing.

**Lanzainquilinos:** The literal translation is “one who throws out tenants”. The term used by Superbarrio to refer to hired thugs or corrupt police officers who violently participate in an eviction by forcibly removing items from a given property. While in the United States the people that takes things out of an evicted house are called movers, Superbarrio refers to these men as more than mere movers.

**Llave del montón:** Superbarrio's finishing move. It is not described in the text.

**Los Pinos:** The official residence and office of the president of Mexico. It is located in Chapultepec Park. When there are references in the text to the “owner of Los Pinos” or other similar descriptions, it is a reference to the president of Mexico.

**Lucha libre:** Professional wrestling in Mexico. It is named in Spanish by professional wrestling fans for this type of specific wrestling which is famous for its high-flying acrobatics and its colorful, masked characters.

**Mask against [blank] match:** A match popularized in lucha libre. One of the wrestlers has a mask, and the other either has another mask or long hair or something that is emblematically identifiable with the wrestler. The idea of the match is that the losing wrestler needs to either lose the mask, which is a sign of disrespect and losing your personality, or shave his head, which is considered mortifying since it

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is revealing their identity. You never see the wrestler without the mask outside of the ring, which is why this is an humiliation.

**Pankration:** A sporting event introduced into the Greek Olympic Games in 648 BC; an empty-handed submission sport with scarcely any rules. The athletes used boxing and wrestling techniques, but also others, such as kicking and holds, locks and chokes on the ground. The only acts considered unacceptable were biting and gouging out the opponent's eyes.

**PECE:** Pacto Económico para el Crecimiento y la Estabilidad, Economic Agreement for Growth and Stability in English. A pact introduced by President Miguel de la Madrid to curb inflation and the devaluation of the *peso*.

**Porfirian elite:** An elite referring to Porfirio Díaz, a seven-time president of Mexico, which were attempting to create a society with Western middle-class values and rejected anything that was different. Connotes corruption and abuse of wealth and power.

**PRI:** Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Institutional Revolutionary Party in English. It is a Mexican political party that had uninterrupted power from 1929 to 2000. The current president, Enrique Peña Nieto, is from this party. The party has been linked by critics to electoral fraud, voter suppression, and violence. PRI is the largest political party in Mexico and its members are called *priístas*.

**SARH:** Secretaría de Agricultura y de Recursos Hidráulicos, Secretariat of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources in English. This institution no longer exists.

Government institution in charge of water conservation and management.

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**SEDUE:** Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology in English. An institution that regulates the urban development and its environment.

**Técnico, científico:** The same as the face or babyface in professional wrestling.

**Telenovela:** A soap opera genre produced in Latin America.

**Three-falls:** In a three-fall match the wrestler who pins his opponent two times wins.

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