



Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story

By Ruth Behar

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Translated Woman tells the story of an unforgettable encounter between Ruth Behar, a Cuban-American feminist anthropologist, and Esperanza Hernández, a Mexican street peddler. The tale of Esperanza's extraordinary life yields unexpected and profound reflections on the mutual desires that bind together anthropologists and their "subjects."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When Cuban American anthropologist Ruth Behar tried to piece together the lives led by women in one Mexican village, she didn't reckon on the stubborn magnetism of Esperanza, who "seemed determined to push her story into my hands and stuff it into my ears, so I could take it back across the border." *Translated Woman* is a giddy rush of dramatic words from Esperanza herself talking late into the night about the hardships and triumphs of her life. Having barely fled the wrath of her drunken father, she takes up with a philandering wife-beater who keeps her in the Mexican version of purdah, complete with a scolding mother-in-law. Looming starvation and the loss of child after child, which she ascribes to the *coraje* (rage) her worthless husband riles up in her breast, impels her to leave him. Gradually she carves out enough work as a street peddler to support herself and her children. Great turns of phrase from Behar and Esperanza enliven this unusual account. Skirting volatile feuds between neighbors, Behar worries lest her research get mired in "a nest of old hatreds." Says Esperanza of being penniless, "I almost had to use one hand to cover my front and another hand to cover my back."

From Publishers Weekly

In 1985 Behar, a feminist anthropologist working in Mexico, befriended street peddler Esperanza Hernandez, an Indian rumored to be a witch--townspeople claimed she used black magic to blind her ex-husband after he had regularly battered her and then left her for his mistress. In Behar's novelistic telling of Esperanza's life story, we meet a macha woman whose arrogance alienated her own mother, and whom Behar implausibly casts as a feminist heroine. Esperanza, who found redemption in a spiritist cult built around Pancho Villa, blames her pent-up rage for the deaths in infancy of the first six of her 12 children. She beat up her husband's lover and threw one of her sons out of the household; she also beat a daughter for refusing to support her and disowned another son for having what she considered an incestuous affair with his uncle's ex-mistress. Behar, who teaches at the University of Michigan, strains to find parallels between her own experience as a Cuban immigrant and that of her bellicose subject. Photos.

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From Library Journal

A 1988 MacArthur award winner, anthropologist Behar has worked in Mexico since 1982. *Translated Woman* is the story of Esperanza, a middle-aged Mexican street peddler. Behar edited her conversations with Esperanza to create a personal narrative incorporating her feminist interpretation of this working-class woman's life. Especially interesting is Esperanza's participation in a spiritualist ritual centering on Pancho Villa. Behar also discusses her relationship with Esperanza in terms of class, ethnic, and national barriers. She concludes with a chapter on her own life and career; her discussion of her ethnicity and the status of Latinas in general is excellent. Recommended for most libraries.

- Gwen Gregory, *U.S. Courts Lib., Phoenix*

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