

Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story. By Ruth Behar. (Boston: Beacon, 1993. xvi, 372 pp. \$25.00, ISBN 0-8070-7052-1.)

Two weeks before I completed reading *Translated Woman*, a student came to my office to inform me he had decided to drop my Chicano/Chicana history class because he did not believe that personal biases, particularly women-centered analyses, should taint the classroom. With that accusation in mind, I returned to Ruth Behar's monograph, finding pleasure in stories about a central female character and an author whose self-reflections evaluated the relationship between two women from vastly different worlds. Behar and her informant *comadre* reminded me why I, as a historian, placed at the center women's stories, which remain neglected. I was refreshed with Behar's postmodern account of Esperanza's *historia muy grande*. The book reassured me that the student who had complained mimicked the traditional face of academe, a face

that has not taken seriously the women who survive at the bottom of socioeconomic and political hierarchies. I was not surprised to read that even Behar had to convince her colleagues that "working on women is a contribution to the discipline."

The anthropologist introduces Esperanza Hernández, who is from a small, dusty town in San Luis Potosí, Mexico; community people fear her powers. Rumors testify that she is a *bruja*, a witch, who bewitched her husband, blinding him for physically and emotionally battering her. Despite her low socioeconomic status as a peddler, Esperanza is neither "demure nor defeated." Her rage (*coraje*) inspires her to construct a life of survival, even though she believes that rage spoiled her milk and thereby killed her newborns. She suffers at the hands of a mother-in-law who protects an abusive son. After several beatings, Esperanza remains resilient. Her resilience takes her to a kitchen with mint-green walls, where she speaks for hours into a tape recorder, often laughing at her own reminiscences.

The text flows between Esperanza's life and Ruth Behar's interpretive, self-critical commentary. An intriguing section recalls the "Pancho Villa cult" of a woman named Chen-

cha, a healer, who reenacted Villa's persona through channeling. The last and fourth part is probably the most autobiographical. The scholar probes with cynicism her life as a "cubanita" in academic exile, crossing borders with an India-mestiza, whose story serves to advance her own career. Rarely do academicians engage their contradictions so honestly.

Ruth Behar has offered a gift. She presents a translation of her *comadre's* words as foreground to a scholar's role as interlocuter between the First and Third worlds. The women's dual lives weave their own story, as the women cross borders through their conversations. Behar's ethnographic data collection, often similar to oral history, is a vital method for gathering women's narratives. I envy Behar's devotion, drawing so much information from one informant, who not only spoke her life lucidly but also encouraged her *comadre* to complete a complex and difficult book. Behar bridges borders, bringing to the academy a hint of the real world by translating Esperanza. The book will become a model for ethnographers, historians, and other scholars crossing disciplines to reconstruct life histories.

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