

INTERVIEW

Translations of the Self: Moving between Objects, Memories, and Words: A Dialogue with Ruth Behar

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Melian-Zamora and Behar A Dialogue with Ruth Behar

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**ABSTRACT** With a central interest in translation as an inherent condition of subjects in contexts of migration, this article encourages a dialogue between ethnographic forms of expression and studies on translation. My exploration of the links between anthropology and translation, as well as their visual and poetic contours, comes through a conversation with Ruth Behar, a writer-anthropologist whose work is deeply rooted in several modes of translation, both

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through and beyond words, as she reflects upon diasporic identities. Through the critical reading of her observations, I hope to offer fresh insights into textual and visual possibilities of translation in anthropological writing, as well as provide an understanding of the complex relationship between translation, language, and the self-other nexus. More broadly, these reflections will contribute to a wider multimodal and multidisciplinary engagement of anthropology with social studies of identity, literary studies, comparative literature, poetic anthropology, visual semiotics, multisemiotic literacy, paratranslation, and other sciences of language. [*translation, ethnographic writing, language, multimodality, Ruth Behar*]

**RESUMEN** Con especial interés en la traducción como condición inherente de sujetos en contextos migratorios, este artículo provoca un diálogo entre formas de expresión etnográfica y estudios sobre traducción. Ese tránsito por líneas de conexión entre antropología y traducción, sus contornos visuales y poéticos, se da mediante una conversación con Ruth Behar, escritora-antropóloga cuyo trabajo aparece vinculado a diversos modos de traducción a través y más allá de las palabras, en sus reflexiones sobre identidades diaspóricas. Espero que las observaciones derivadas de este diálogo contribuyan a continuar pensando en nuevas posibilidades textuales y visuales de traducción en la escritura antropológica, y en las complejas relaciones entre traducción, lengua(jes) y el *other-self*. De una forma más amplia, estas reflexiones pueden estrechar las relaciones multimodales y multidisciplinares de la antropología con los estudios sociales de identidad, estudios literarios, literatura comparada, antropología poética, semiótica visual, prácticas de lenguaje multisemóticas (*literacy*), paratraducción y otras ciencias del lenguaje. [*traducción, escritura etnográfica, lenguaje, multimodalidad, Ruth Behar*]

**RESUMO** Com especial interesse na tradução como condição inerente de sujeitos em contextos migratórios, este artigo provoca um diálogo entre formas de expressão etnográfica e estudos sobre tradução. Esse transitar por linhas de conexão entre antropologia e tradução, seus

contornos visuais e poéticos, acontece por meio de uma conversa com Ruth Behar, escritora-antropóloga cujo trabalho aparece vinculado a modos de tradução através e além das palavras, na medida em que reflete sobre identidades diaspóricas. Com esse diálogo, espero contribuir com novos insights para continuar aprofundando nas possibilidades textuais e visuais da tradução na escrita antropológica, e nas complexas relações entre tradução, língua(gens) e o *other-self*. De uma forma mais ampla, essas reflexões podem estreitar as relações multimodais e multidisciplinares da antropologia com os estudos sociais de identidade, estudos literários, literatura comparada, antropologia poética, semiótica visual, letramento multissemiótico, paratradução e outras ciências da linguagem. [*tradução, escrita etnográfica, linguagem, multimodalidade, Ruth Behar*]

El trabajo del traductor está hecho de vacilaciones, igual que el trabajo del escritor. . . . El escritor se traduce a sí mismo como si fuera otro, el traductor escribe al otro como si fuera él mismo

–Pablo de Santis, *La Traducción*

[The work of the translator consists of uncertainties, exactly like the work of the writer. . . . The writer translates her Self as if she were Other, and the translator writes the Other as if it were her Self.]

With a central interest in translation as an inherent condition of displaced subjects in contexts of migration, this article provokes a dialogue between ethnographic forms of writing and

studies on translation. The exploration of points of connection between anthropology and translation, as well as their visual and poetic contours, comes through a conversation with Ruth Behar, a Cuban American writer-anthropologist who experiments with and transgresses the limits of the field and whose work has been deeply rooted in several modes of translation within and beyond words as she reflects upon stories of different diasporas and many reinventions of identities.<sup>i</sup>

Ruth Behar is the Victor Haim Perera Collegiate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan. In her work, she explores multiple genres and forms of expression—from academic studies to literary fiction, poetry, memoir, and audiovisual work (documentary and photography).<sup>ii</sup> As an anthropologist, she has focused on unfolding the subjective nature of doing research and has discussed the idea of (non)belonging and how elements of loss and memory are creators of experience that help reconfigure the self and ideas of home. For her, anthropology was the pathway to start writing fictional stories and poetry. Today—with the influence of authors such as Cuban poet Dulce María Loynaz and a spectrum of women writers who have addressed the significance of border-crossing and the complexities of identities—she writes about the voices of her own world and the lost voices she tries to retrieve in and through a convergence of verbal and imagetic languages. In many of her stories, it seems that such languages become a means to come to terms with the paradoxes of an inherited exile.

To speak about diasporic identities unavoidably leads to a discussion of language and translation. To exist in a diaspora is to exist in a constant state of translation, in which identities are (re)named and (re)signified by means of languages. In such moves, identities might often end up being reduced; but they might also either resist reduction or clash and embrace what

they become when translated by others. This idea around the reconfiguration of identities and languages in multilingual or diasporic settings finds relevant connections with a large body of academic literature on the notions of diaspora, multilingualism (heterolingualism or literary multilingualism), and translation. An incomplete list that dialogues with the argumentative line of this text includes the works on multilingual writing as translation by Delabastita (2009) and Delabastita and Grutman (2005) and discussions on self-translation by Grutman (2013), Grutman and Bolderen (2014) and Walkowitz (2015). It also connects with a wealth of literature within the fields of translation and anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986, and many other authors after the *Writing Culture* debate: Agar 2011; Bachmann-Medick 2009, 2014; Bachmann-Medick and Kugele 2018; Buzelin 2013; Mannheim 2015; Rubel and Rosman 2003; Stallaert 2017; Sturge 2007, 2009, 2011) that has challenged the applicability of widespread definitions of translation, questioned the originality and distinctiveness of languages, and highlighted the tensions in the representation of alterity via translation.

Within such a rich constellation of literatures, I wanted to explore how Ruth Behar, as an anthropologist who writes and (self)translates from a certain diaspora and position within academia, envisions the notion of translation. What place does translation occupy in her life and as a writer? What role does it play as she transitions along places, languages, and genres and engages in multimodal possibilities of expressions to tell shared stories? How has multimodal translation reshaped the stories she has written about others and the images conveyed about herself through writing?

As a researcher and professor of translation, and as someone who once migrated from Cuba and now lives in between languages and places, I asked Ruth Behar questions that were both

academically and personally driven. After working as a professor of translation/interpretation at the University of Havana, I moved to Brazil in 2010 to pursue a doctoral degree. It was there where my interest in language research gradually acquired other dimensions as I started to incorporate the notion of translation to reflect on the reconfigurations of the self when they detach/reattach to places as a result of migratory moves.

I shall point out that in earlier versions of this manuscript, I had deliberately avoided making explicit those personal motivations behind the production of this interview, fearing that this might convey an impression of a simplified argument or an unfounded mirroring of experiences between myself and Ruth Behar, the anthropologist. Despite having Cuba as a shared geographic inspiration for many of our academic endeavors and as a departure point for our individual diasporic *sobrevivencias*, it is the spaces that distance us that interest me the most (generational, academic, migratory) in our understanding of the themes raised here. Since all this background information constitutes an important part of the methodological construction of the questions, I hope that it operates in the text by enriching and resonating the insights that emerged as a result. In this context of feeling connected because of our shared birthplace, while at the same time acknowledging how different we are from one another because of personal and professional distinctions, I have taken the liberty of calling Behar by her first name, Ruth, as she herself encouraged me to do, viewing this interview as a dialogue between colleagues.

In terms of methodology, an interview with the anthropologist seemed more suitable for the interdisciplinary mechanisms I was aiming at to explore all these questions, while creating a dynamic narrative that brought together common concerns from two overlapping fields. Most of this interview was conducted in Ruth's small office at the University of Michigan, a space that

looks more like a cozy living room packed with books and an unusual range of objects from her travels, each of which seems to be whispering a story. A subsequent part of our interview took place via e-mail as we worked to create a coherent text. The result is reproduced below.

At certain moments, some of Ruth's answers made me feel that I might have slanted several of my questions. I wondered if I had been expecting her to convey responses I had previously imagined based on my own experiences as a Cuban away from home and someone whose language now leans to and finds some comfort in foreign words. Not only did her answers show me other angles, but they also came to me in the form of stories, through which she unfolded other ways to discuss the significance of translation in the life of a writer in addition to the individual ways our life experiences could affect/infect the relationships we establish with languages and their many accents. Maybe most important, this conversation made me go back to the idea of how translation and writing necessarily and profoundly need the Other in order to materialize: the bonds we create with people through art and other verbal and visual languages allow us to find and tell our shared stories. This certain degree of complicity with ourselves but especially with the Other—this collision with words and lives—as we move along is what helps us retrieve forgotten stories, allowing them to continue to live, or to survive (in the Benjaminian sense of the word), despite their persistence in slipping away.

Through the reading of Ruth's observations, I hope to bring insights with which we can continue to explore the textual and visual possibilities of translation in anthropological writing, as well as to think about the complex relationships between translation, languages, and the Other-self (the Other in the self, and the self in the Other).<sup>iii</sup> Besides my particular interest in contributing to translation research in contexts of migration, I believe that on a broader scope these reflections

can certainly add to wider multimodal and multidisciplinary engagement of anthropology with social studies of identity, literary studies, comparative literature, poetic anthropology, visual semiotics, multimedial literacy, paratranslation, and other sciences of language.

**Rita Melian Zamora (RMZ):** Literature written by immigrants seems to occupy a particular realm: that of self-translation. Generally, the language in which they write their work is not their mother tongue (there is often a multilingual approach to writing). Do you see your work as a writer as a work of (self)translation? Or even better, what place does translation occupy in the way you write narratives?

**Ruth Behar (RB):** *Bueno me encanta la pregunta, y creo que sí, que de cierta manera no soy diferente a otros emigrantes, porque siempre tenemos que auto-traducir. . . .* I slipped into Spanish, but I know I should be speaking in English for this interview. I must start by saying that I was an immigrant child, I learned to self-translate at a very early age. I knew that there was one language spoken at home and then another language spoken in public, in school, and I had to move between these two languages. My parents only spoke Spanish to my brother and me. Home was always expressed in Spanish, and then school, the world outside, public places, those were the sites where we'd speak English. But I happened to love Spanish. I had a very good high school teacher who was Cuban, Mrs. Mercedes Rodriguez, and she encouraged me to keep studying Spanish. I studied it in college, and I went on to do my research as an anthropologist in Spain, Mexico, and Cuba. I've been living in the Spanish language, in my work and my research, since I was a young woman.



In my writing, I always come back to English. It's strange, you would think I could do all of my academic work in Spanish, but because my education was primarily in English, that is the language in which I feel stronger as a writer. Though with poetry, it's different; we can talk more about that later. Generally speaking, I'm always translating between the emotional and personal side of myself to the analytical and academic side of myself in my writing. The translation moves between different forms of thinking and different kinds of feeling.

In recent years, what has changed is that I have been writing fiction in English and moving towards making English a language of emotions, a language of family, as I try to tell intimate and personal stories in English rather than in Spanish. In poetry, I move much more fluidly between the languages. I wouldn't say it's self-translation; I would say it's a fluid movement between languages, because I'll start a poem in English, I'll think of how I might say that same thing in Spanish, then I move to writing in Spanish, and before I finish I move back to the English, and then I go, "wait, I can change this," and I return again to the Spanish. There might be a word that I love in Spanish—for example, I love the word *marchitar*, in an expression such as, *se marchitaron las flores* (the flowers wither). I love that word, *marchitar*, for how it sounds and feels, for its rhythm and musicality. Words are not just to express meanings or communicate messages or to make rational sense; there's also the music of the words. The musicality of certain words in Spanish is beautiful to my ears, and I want to try to render that in English. But *wither* in English and *marchitar* in Spanish sound very different, so then I am challenged to think about whether I like the English words I have chosen in relation to the feelings inspired by the Spanish words. Since childhood, I've been in the position of the translator, living experiences in Spanish that I re-presented in English so outsiders could understand. Now I write those re-presentations down in stories to share them with readers.

**RMZ:** Your answer to that question makes me think about the relationships that we establish with languages with the passage of time. Time has an enormous influence on our relationship to language. Whenever I am writing within academic contexts, it all comes to me in Portuguese more easily, probably because most of my years as a researcher developed in Brazil, so Portuguese was the background for our discussions.

**RB:** Right, what happens is that your mind gets used to certain frameworks of thinking. Languages position us in all these different ways in terms of routine habits and also under the different systems in which you participate as a speaker, reader, and writer of a language. If you participated in the academic system in Brazil, that puts you in a certain position. My work has unfolded in the academic system in the United States, so English is my dominant academic language. But I have published a number of academic writings in Spanish, as well. I find that my Spanish gets rusty when I'm not using it. I'll go to Cuba and feel as if I've forgotten so many words and phrases. But after a few days, I'll say, "Wait, words are coming back. I can speak intelligent Spanish again." Languages need to be used or they slip away. I don't think you ever lose a native language completely, but you lose the complexity of a language and start losing vocabulary, idioms, very quickly, if you're not using them every day.

**RMZ:** Your work encompasses a variety of forms, ranging from anthropological conceptualizations and literary prose and poetry to an association with other art forms, such as your collaboration with Cuban book artist Rolando Estévez, who has translated beyond words several of your books, poems, and essays. In a way, Estévez has given your texts another vessel

or an artistic body, transforming them into unexpected objects to be read. When I first saw Estévez's transformation of your books, I thought of the Brazilian movement of concrete poetry (*poesia concreta*), which attempted to exploit the physical and audiovisual dimensions of verbal language. That movement's creators, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos (the Campos brothers, or *os irmãos Campos*), highlighted the creative and fictional dimensions of translating poetry, which for them was an act of *transcriação* (trans-creation) or *transfingimento*,<sup>iv</sup> dialoguing with one of Fernando Pessoa's most famous poems<sup>v</sup> in which the poet is described as a *fingidor* (a feigner, a faker, a pretender). Under this logic, if a poet is a *fingidor*, then the translator (Estévez, in this case) is a *transfingidor*, as stated by Haroldo de Campos (1991).

In your collaboration with Estévez, to what extent do you get involved in this artistic/creative process? How much freedom do you give him for this re-creation? And how much of your "identity" gets translated through the images you build together?

**RB:** I am so lucky to have had a long friendship and been able to work in collaboration with Rolando Estévez. When we first met, there was a deep connection because his family left Cuba for Miami in 1969. Immigration had affected him profoundly; he knew about diaspora from having been left behind. When his parents decided to leave the island, they could take his younger sister, who was eight, but he was fifteen and wasn't permitted to leave Cuba because he was of military age. His family, like so many Cuban families at that time, made a painful decision. He stayed with his godparents, and his parents hoped they'd eventually get him out of Cuba. But by the time they were able to go back to Cuba—ten years later, in 1979, right before the Mariel exodus—he had decided he didn't want to leave. He'd experienced severe trauma about feeling abandoned and decided that Cuba was home.

When I met Estévez in 1994, he was exploring art as a form of expression (by the way, he uses his last name as his one and only name). He had not seen his sister in all those years, and I was a woman from the diaspora, looking for my roots, looking for my language, my culture, my history. It was a shock to him that I had come to Cuba. I was a sister figure to him, like a long-lost sister. Our relationship started on an emotional level: I was searching for something I'd lost, he was searching for something he'd lost, and we connected around that, this shared search (Figure 1).

**[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]**

Those early return trips to Cuba were very emotional for me in the early 1990s. And I turned to poetry to give voice to feelings I couldn't express any other way. It was traumatic to return to Cuba against my parents' will, carrying their memories, fears, and grief. I couldn't do anthropology at first. But I wrote poems.

Estévez had cofounded Ediciones Vigía in 1985. This is an artisanal press in the city of Matanzas, and he worked as Vigía's artistic designer. Upon seeing the beautiful handmade books he designed, books of poetry, essays, and short stories, I was immediately enamored of his work. I told him about poems, and he said, "Well, you'll have to translate them into Spanish, or write them in Spanish, because I want to read your poems."

That's how the relationship started. I wrote poems, and he read them and gave me comments. This artistic collaboration began right after we met. In 1995, Ediciones Vigía published *Poemas que Vuelven a Cuba/Poems Returned to Cuba* (Behar 1995). That was my first publication as a poet (Figure 2). I became a poet in Cuba. I was the first Cuban American poet that Ediciones Vigía published. And I was the first author to publish a bilingual Spanish-English book with Vigía.

**[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]**

That experience was so moving. *Le entregué los poemas*, you know, I surrendered the poems to Estévez. I responded to his comments and saw that my writing was growing stronger. I started thinking, "Maybe I'm a poet." Being a poet was something I had very much wanted to be. I had been discouraged in college and given up writing poetry when I went into anthropology. But with Estévez's support, I reclaimed my identity as a poet in Cuba.

Seeing the design that Estévez created for that first book we did together, I was very moved that he'd used a childhood picture of me on the cover, in which I am on the balcony of the Havana apartment where I once lived with my family. I'd given him a bunch of pictures of me as a little girl in Cuba, and he chose that picture and took a red string and then placed the Cuban flag at the end of it, so it's meant to be a kite the little girl is holding. That red string wraps around the book, ties it shut, and when it's untied, it opens it. The Cuban flag opens and closes the book. It was such a thoughtful design, the way Estévez thought of the kite with the Cuban flag as a symbolic way of bringing me back to Cuba. It was interesting for me as an anthropologist to

realize that someone was interpreting me. As you were saying before, I was being trans-created visually by Estévez. He translated my words into images. Keep in mind that Estévez himself is also a poet and an excellent writer. Being seen and translated through his eyes affirmed my identity as a poet and writer. He turned the anthropologist into the anthropologized subject, which gave me new knowledge of who I am.

After writing that first book of poetry about the emotional journey of returning to Cuba, I became immersed in Dulce María Loynaz's poetry. Thanks to Estévez, I was introduced to her work, and I had the opportunity to meet her and talk to her several times. I was so inspired by Loynaz's *Poemas sin nombre* (Nameless poems) that I started writing my own *poemas sin nombre*. The first versions of my poems didn't have titles, they had numbers, just like Loynaz's poems. Finding out about her work was liberating for me as poet (Figure 3). Loynaz's prose poems were lyrical yet blunt meditations; they were about regret, they were about loss, they were about frustrated love. These poems spoke to me like no other poetry had ever spoken to me. Her work made me want to keep writing poetry. I witnessed her poetry being rediscovered by a younger Cuban generation. I was fortunate to know her personally too. She was extraordinarily brave. She felt silenced by the revolution and stopped writing after 1959. But she never left Cuba and she lived the last years of her life inside her ruined mansion in Vedado. Visiting her there was both eerie and magical.

**[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]**

During those years that I was inspired by Loynaz, the poems that I was writing had a sense of urgency. I was about to turn forty. It was a tumultuous time. That's when I started writing my book *Everything I Kept/ Todo lo que Guardé*, a collection of poems in English and Spanish. I wrote those poems over a summer and I showed them to Estévez. He had a few comments about the Spanish that led me to change the English versions. He would ask me, "Is this really what you mean to say? Or do you mean this?" And I would look up the words and think about them, and then the Spanish would change, and that would change what I had originally wanted to say in English. He was my mentor. He read the poems very carefully. And the design with the suitcase on the cover was so powerful because he understood that it was an important symbol for me, both as a Cuban and as a Jew.

As a Cuban, the suitcase is powerful as a marker of departure and loss, and as an anthropologist, the suitcase is a strong symbol as well, because in our profession you are always displacing yourself, carrying things back and forth. Then there's the condition of being an immigrant, an exile, of having your life reduced to a suitcase. There is the Jewish significance, too. When the Jews were expelled from their homes in Poland and other countries in Europe during the war, they didn't know they'd be sent to concentration camps; they thought they were being resettled. Jews packed suitcases and at the concentration camps they were taken away. In Auschwitz, they have a huge room with a collection of all these suitcases. The suitcase, which is often associated with leisure travel, is a horribly painful symbol. People that thought that they were going on some sort of journey, but were being led to their death, naively carried suitcases filled with their belongings, not knowing they would be stripped of everything, including their humanity.

Given all this context, Estévez's idea to use a three-dimensional suitcase on the cover of the Ediciones Vigía edition of the book was very meaningful. He knew the story of my parents having spent their honeymoon in Varadero, and he collected sand from Varadero Beach to line the inside of the suitcase. Imagine my delight when I learned that the book had actual sand from Varadero Beach! It was just amazing. When he was making the book, he asked me to get some Velcro to him in Cuba before my trip there. I had no idea what it was for, but I was able to get the Velcro to him via a friend. Until I went to Cuba and saw the book, I didn't know the Velcro was needed to open and close the suitcase. He made straps for the suitcase, and the Velcro was essential so the reader could peer inside the suitcase on the cover. This was a trans-creation on many levels. He had been observing me and listening to my stories, both the stories I told him in conversation and the stories that were in the poems, and he drew on those stories to create a visual representation (Figures 4a and 5b). I had never had that experience in my life, of working with a visual artist who could take things I'd said and interpret them so forcefully, finding ways to invent symbols for the experiences I tried to express in words.

**[FIGURES 4A AND B ABOUT HERE]**

I wrote a short story called *La Cortada*, and Estévez also came up with a fascinating visual representation for it, thinking about the many different ways to be *cortada*, to be cut to pieces. You can have your tongue cut out, lose your language, you can be *cortada* in that you're shy and you don't know what to say. "Estoy cortada, no se que decir," as the expression goes. Estévez created a set of images with *La Cortada*, the woman who can't speak (Figure 5a). In that book, there is a handmade envelope that contains puzzle pieces (Figure 5b), and it asks you to build another image of *La Cortada*. Here, too, Estévez offered a view of my life as someone who's



fragmented, who's here and there, who speaks Spanish and English, who carries around her Cuban story, but it's all in bits and pieces; this is the fragmented condition of someone who exists in a diaspora.

**[FIGURES 5A AND B ABOUT HERE]**

I became a certain kind of mirror to Estévez, and he was a certain kind of mirror to me. His eloquence in Spanish has always moved me so much. When he introduces me at events, his lucid and gorgeous words, they seem stunning to me. I imagine who I might have been if I'd had that capacity to speak Spanish in the way he speaks, as someone who never lost his native tongue. And I think he looks at me and thinks, who would he have been if he'd left Cuba with his family and become part of the Cuban diaspora.

Estévez has since reunited with his sister, his real sister, who lives in Florida. Even though it seems he had the sadder life because he lost his family, his sister has had a difficult life. His sister was the one who had to live with a mother who was irreparably wounded for having left her son behind. He experienced his mother's trauma when he saw her later in life, but those were brief, if fraught, encounters. After I invited Estévez to present his work at the University of Michigan in 1998, he was able to see his sister again after years of separation. Our relationship facilitated his family reunification. He has since visited Michigan several times as a visiting artist and was able to see his mother before she died.

What began as a relationship focused on poetry and artistic collaboration is now also a friendship because we've spent so much time together, both in Cuba and in the United States. I've visited Estévez and stayed at his house in Matanzas, and he's stayed in our house in Ann Arbor. Our bridges go in both directions.

I continue to send Estévez new writing, whether it's poetry, essays, or stories. I send him words and he transforms them into amazing handmade books. Recently he created a *pergamino*, a book that is actually a scroll, for my Sephardic story "Un cierto aire sefardi" (A sephardi air; Figures 6a and 6b), which appears in my book *Traveling Heavy*. He gave a lot of thought to how to visualize this story. He went online, which is now possible to do in Cuba, to look for Sephardic symbols. In the Jewish context, the question of illustration is interesting because visual symbols are rarely used. It's unlike Catholicism, with the different saints, where there is so much that can be shown visually. Jews venerate an unrepresentable God. Estévez researched all this and he found the images that can be used, such as the lion, the menorah, the Jewish star. He also learned about the Torah scrolls that are kept inside the altar, or *bimah*, and created a representation of these scrolls on the cover of a book that is itself a scroll.

**[FIGURES 6A AND B ABOUT HERE]**

**RMZ:** *Translated Woman* is probably your first book where you brought the translation aspect into play, or maybe where you have brought this topic into view most explicitly. Translation is not only one of the book's main themes but also its means for its materialization (Figure 7). We get to meet Esperanza constructed through multiple translation layers, the linguistic translation

(Spanish to English) being an essential one. And this is interesting because if you think about it, whenever we read a text (either technical, academic, literary) readers seldom stop to ask whether it was written by the author herself or it was rewritten by someone else, in a different place and time. This tends to be irrelevant for common readers. But it would be impossible to ignore this particular aspect in *Translated Woman*, where you emphasize the existence of a mediation, and even if you didn't, each word or phrase in Spanish within the English prose reminds us that all the rest was translated. What could you tell us about the writing/translation process of this book? In other words, and going back to our epigraph, where did the *vacilaciones* or hesitations lie?

**[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]**

**RB:** That's a great question. The idea of the "translated woman" came to me on several levels in working with Esperanza Hernández. When I met her in the 1980s, I was interviewing many different women in the town of Mexquitic, which is half an hour away from the city of San Luis Potosí. I wanted to write a book about women in Mexico. I imagined I'd focus on five or six women and tell their stories.

And then I met Esperanza. She was assertive about telling me her story. At first, I was shy with her. She had developed the habit of telling her story to city women who were upper and middle class. She was a street peddler and would travel from Mexquitic to the city of San Luis with buckets of fruits and vegetables from her garden. She had different women clients to whom she sold her products and would tell her story. The story was told to win sympathy, to win interest

in her as a person, so others in a social class above hers would understand that she was not simply a peddler but a human being who had a story that needed to be known.

I was aware from the beginning that I wasn't the first person to hear her story. At first, I just listened. I would meet with Esperanza, listen to her. After many visits, I said, "Can we tape it?" That's how we started. And as I taped Esperanza's story and listened to her tell her story, in Spanish, of course, the question that you're raising here was crucial. Which Spanish was she telling me the story in? Hers was the Spanish of a woman of Indigenous background who no longer spoke an Indigenous language. She formed part of the Indigenous community that lost their culture and became Mexicanized into Spanish. But she used many regionalisms in her speech, which was enmeshed in folklore and popular *mexicanismos* (Mexicanisms). She would punctuate with *pues*, and then, I wondered how I would translate her story. Her Spanish was different from my Cuban Spanish, or the Castilian Spanish I'd learned in Spain. It was a unique Mexican Spanish. How would I render it with the vividness of the original in English? In addition to these linguistic issues, Esperanza urged me to take the story across the border and publish it in English. She was concerned about what other women in the town would think of her for having told me her story without leaving out any of the pain and suffering and shame.

By the time we were working together and recording her story, Esperanza had made me her *comadre*. I became a *madrina* of her daughter, who was celebrating her *quince*. She had different people—as is the custom in Mexico—serve as *madrinas* and *padrinos* whose responsibility it was to buy different things needed for the *quinceañera*. To me, she said, "You're going to buy the cake for my daughter and that's how you're going to become my *comadre*." And I agreed. I not only had to get a big three-tier cake, I had to get the little *muñeca*, the little doll that goes on top

of the cake, and I had to make sure to get the doll with a purple dress because her daughter was wearing a purple dress for the event. And so, we became *comadres*, which meant that we had a special relationship, of respect, of being there to help each other. We weren't *cualquiera* to each other; I wasn't a stranger. We were *comadres*, or "co-mothers." We had a relationship of spiritual kinship.

But even though we had that relationship, she was concerned that other people in the town might think that she was getting something out of me, gaining privileges or financial support. She was also afraid that people would laugh at her. "Oh, she's telling her story to her gringa *comadre*, oh look at that, isn't that funny, she's getting her *comadre* to write about her." And then she herself said—though she didn't go so far as to say write my story down in English—but she said, "You can take the story, *llévalo al otro lado para que lo lean los gringos*." She had a concept of translation. The story would not circulate in Spanish, at her own request. I would take the story across the border. My job was to take the story and render it into English so the gringos could read it, so the gringos could wonder, "Is it true? Is it false? Is it a *cuento*?" (Figure 8). She herself set the terms for our exchange as anthropologist and research subject. She did not want her story—at least initially—to circulate in Spanish. She pushed me to be a translator.

I should add, in regard to the circulation of Esperanza's story, that when I first met Estévez I was in Cuba to present *Translated Woman* at the Havana Book Fair. He knew about Esperanza's story even before it appeared in Spanish. I invited him to create the illustration for the cover of the tenth-anniversary edition, and in addition he created a separate illustration imagining me and Esperanza together—another of his amazing interpretations of my work, which captures the vulnerability of the ethnographic relationship.

[FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE]

But to continue where we left off: working with Esperanza, I became intensely aware of our class differences. I could travel back and forth from the United States to Mexico and she could not. David and I used to travel by car; we were young, didn't have much money, we couldn't afford plane fares, so we would take our car and go back and forth. But in Mexico, this was a mark of privilege. The privilege of being able to travel, of being able to cross the border, that was a privilege that Esperanza lacked, and she commented on it frequently through remarks about *el otro lado*. She'd say, "Cómo es en el otro lado?" (What's it like on the other side?). Or she'd bemoan, "Yo no voy a llegar al otro lado" (I won't make it to the other side). For her, *el otro lado* was unreachable because of her race/class status. Through these conversations, I realized it wasn't just a life story I was translating, or just words I was translating. I was taking her with me across the border by means of her story. I was translating her, I was turning her into a translated woman, and I was turning myself into a translated woman because I was hearing the story in Spanish, a language I could perfectly understand, but I had been given this mission to translate it into English and bring it across the border. We were two translated women. She was translated in one way, I was translated in another.

And I was also translating in yet another sense: the story needed to be interpreted in such a way that it would be of interest to people in the academic world. It was not just a matter of “here’s an interesting story, I’m going to share it with you, I’m going to turn it into a novel,” as writers have done, as Elena Poniatowska has done so expertly with her *novelas testimoniales*. I could have done that, and actually my friend the author Sandra Cisneros, when she read the manuscript, she said, “You know, this could be a novel.” And I said, “Oh, no, I can’t do that. I’m doing this as anthropology.”

At the time, I couldn’t conceive of using Esperanza’s story to create a fictional account. My work with her came through my commitment to anthropology. I needed to be ethical about it. How do I translate her story and stay true to what she told me? I had to find a way to make the story a subject of analysis, a work I could interpret and share with colleagues in anthropology and other disciplines. The field of women’s studies at the time was very interested in stories of diverse women, particularly women of the Third World (as the term was used then). I had to translate the story in yet another way, which was to give it an academic significance. What does the story mean in terms of feminism? Or better, what kind of feminism was meaningful to Esperanza? I had to read her story in those terms. I had to interpret what her veneration of Pancho Villa, as a spirit deity, meant to her as a woman. She had a picture of Pancho Villa in her altar dedicated to la Virgen de Guadalupe. She was a member of a spiritist cult where the leader of the cult was a medium who would channel the spirit of Pancho Villa at the spiritual sessions they held in San Luis Potosí, to which I would go with Esperanza. Her story had to be given a framework that was intellectual, that was theoretical, and that could also travel within academic circles, and in that way be translated yet again, depending on how people would interpret it, or read it, or criticize it.

One of the most complicated and provocative things I did in the book was to add a final chapter called “The Biography in the Shadow,” which was about me and my relationship to Esperanza and how working with her changed me and made me think about how I came to my privilege as an academic woman. The encounter with Esperanza made me reflect on my education, my struggles with my father, who felt a woman didn’t need a university education, the difficulties I’d faced as a first-generation student and the first person in my family to receive a PhD. I saw myself as translating in that regard as well, translating myself through Esperanza. She was a mirror for me, even though we were incredibly different. She, as an exquisite storyteller, led me to think about the stories I needed to tell, not just about her life but about my own life.

That chapter was very criticized. Some readers thought it unnecessary; they found it too self-revealing and thought it was taking attention away from Esperanza, that it was narcissistic. Students told me their teachers would assign the book and tell them not to read the last chapter. Of course, they would read it! It was taboo, so they wanted to read it. I had conceived of it as yet another perspective on translation, but not everyone saw it that way. Perhaps I had taken translation too far? It was an experiment I felt compelled to carry out then.

It was a project in which I was taking a story that I had tape-recorded and transcribed and translated and edited and shaped and then put together to create a book. I felt I was inventing a genre. It wasn’t fiction, but what kind of ethnography was it? The first version of the manuscript was extremely long, around five hundred pages, and my editor saw it and said, “I’m sorry but we can’t publish such a long book. You’re going to have to edit and cut this down by two hundred



pages.” I already felt—and I talk about this in the book—that I was cutting out Esperanza’s tongue—*cortándole la lengua*. “But I have already cut out so much, the story is so much longer,” I told my editor, and she said, “It’s not going to be readable for anybody.”

What does readability mean? I had to go back, translate and edit yet again and remove many scenes, many stories. The story is many, many stories strung together. One story would lead to another story and to another story. Esperanza had all of these interwoven stories, like the Russian nesting dolls, where you open up one doll and there’s another doll, and then open up it up and there’s another. Esperanza was aware that she was telling a story. She thought of her story as having *capítulos*, as having chapters, and this was because she had seen telenovelas. She had the structure of the telenovela as a storytelling structure. “Bueno, hoy, le voy a contar este capítulo,” she’d say. “Now I’m going to tell you about this part of my childhood. . . . Now I’m going to tell you about the time I met the man that would become my husband.” Her life had acquired a sense of order because she had turned it into a story that could be passed on to others.

**RMZ:** It’s fascinating!

**RB:** Yes, it is. Esperanza was an amazing oral storyteller. The only reason she couldn’t write her own story was because she came from poverty. Her education ended in second grade, so she was barely literate. That was a result of the trauma of poverty and the fact that she also had a terrible father, who was very violent, and she had a terrible husband who was very violent. As a girl and a woman, she didn’t have the opportunity to study, and she had to work from a very

young age. I was very aware that I was receiving this story and that I would retell it as a writer because she couldn't. But not because she didn't have the intelligence to tell it herself. The poverty that she had lived under all her life had not allowed her to become literate. There were other women in the town that were schoolteachers, but they were more economically privileged. Esperanza was poor in comparison and so didn't become literate. I could use my literacy, my ability to write, to put her story down on paper. She couldn't write her story, but she passed it on to me, very consciously, knowing she could tell it but she couldn't write it because of the trauma of poverty.

**RMZ:** It is so interesting how she gave you the structure she wanted her story to have—in a way.

**RB:** In a way, yes. I definitely had to add some of my own ideas of structure. This is where interpretation and translation are a similar process. She told me many things I could write down exactly as she told them to me, but I had to then read them, interpret them, make sure they made sense to an outsider who hadn't been with her in the kitchen with the mint-green walls. And it all had to make sense to me to be able to write it. When she told me the story of how so many of her children had died as babies because she was giving them poisoned breast milk . . .

**RMZ:** Because of the *coraje*.

**RB:** Because of the *coraje*.

**RMZ:** Which is a word I didn't quite understand at the beginning . . .

**RB:** I didn't understand it either because we don't use *coraje* that way in Cuba. *Coraje* is courage to us, but *coraje* in Mexico means *rabia*, anger, rage. I didn't get it at first, and I had to do a double take and listen, "Ah, *coraje* means this." Esperanza would talk about the *coraje*, and how the anger that she felt for how she was being so violently treated by her mother-in-law, by her husband, that anger would contaminate her breast milk, the breast milk that would be fed to the babies, and then the babies would die of this anger that she felt. She would tell me that, but I had to figure out what it meant and how to interpret it. The stories would come uninterpreted, and my job was not only to listen and retell the story but to interpret the story and think about the symbolism she was using, the idea that breast milk could be poisonous in this way. She was using a kind of magical thinking I found very compelling and which relates to all that we know today about the effects of stress on our health.

So I was there, always listening. You mentioned psychoanalysis. It wasn't that I acted as her psychoanalyst, not by any means, but I was there to listen and to give her story validation and importance. Yes, this story is worth telling. It's so important that I'm writing it down, recording it and writing it. It's going to be a book. And when I think about it, the process took many years of my life, to both do the research and write the book. The translation was also about bringing this work into my own body. I remember all of those trips back and forth to Mexico to talk to Esperanza, all the time that it took to record and transcribe. Transcribing tapes back then—actual tapes—was a tiring and difficult process that took a toll on my back, on my body, sitting

at my desk for long hours. I had a transcribing machine, and you used your foot and pressed on the foot pedal to turn the recorder on and off. It was almost like sewing. I was stitching together her story. I remember myself as a young woman, almost thirty years ago, sitting there and listening to the story, transcribing it, translating it. It was physical labor. Of course, Esperanza had lived the story, but it went through my body too. To put it on the page was not just a matter of listening and, "Okay, let's write the story." It was the result of many nights of staying up very late, when my son was a baby, a small child, one or two in the morning, and I was awake at my desk. So, the physical labor of translation, it was not just going from Spanish to English; it was mental labor, physical labor, to put Esperanza's story down on the page, and then the various levels of work that it took to turn her story into a book.

It's inconceivable to me now how I turned all of that oral storytelling, with the many stops and starts and numerous digressions, into a book. The transcriptions had to be compressed, edited, and interpreted so it could make sense to someone who didn't know her, who hadn't heard her tell the story. It took a lot of work because Esperanza was a person who could speak for many, many hours. There was a lot of material to work with. She was different from the other women I spoke to in Mexquitic, where I felt I was literally begging for more words, saying, "Me puede contar un poco más?" (Tell me a little more, please?). It was so hard to get stories out of most of the women I spoke to. But Esperanza was the opposite. You would start the conversation and she would talk and talk. That was great. That was one of the things that attracted me to her, that she was a very willing speaker and research subject. "Wait, she wants to talk!" But then, when I sat down to write the book, I realized, "Oh my god, I have so much here, so much storytelling, so much to listen to and make decisions about." From the writer's perspective, it was very complicated, and there was a lot to think about in bringing her story to the page.

**RMZ:** Was this process very different from *Cuéntame algo, aunque sea una mentira* (the Spanish version of *Translated Woman*)? How did you approach this *destrucción* or “untranslation?” I know you worked with some translators.

**RB:** Yes, I had three translators work with me on the Spanish edition of the book. They were David Frye, my husband; a Mexican translator, Mariano Sánchez-Ventura; and a Cuban translator, Alfredo Alonso Estenoz. There was so much to do that I had to delegate the translation to others. David helped find all the transcriptions that I had made from the original Spanish as well as all of the notes that I had from the recordings. Much was printed out, but when he couldn't find the portions of text I needed, he had to go back to the tapes, to the original Spanish. I didn't want to translate the translation, because that didn't make any sense. The story had been told to me in Spanish and I wanted it to conserve all the *mexicanismos*. It would have been easier to translate the English into Spanish, but I wanted to find all the Spanish original phrases, everything, the exact way Esperanza had told the story. David helped me with that. Then Alfredo translated some sections, and Mariano, the Mexican translator, worked on the final chapters.

The other thing to know is that Fondo de Cultura Económica, the publisher of the Spanish edition, suggested removing two of the final chapters, so the Spanish edition is a little shorter. The Spanish edition has the whole story and then the “The Biography in the Shadow,” but it doesn't have the chapter about Pancho Villa, which is a long historical chapter, and another chapter about religion that were in the English version. Those two chapters were explanatory

and made sense for a non-Mexican audience that needed the context and background, but for a Spanish-speaking audience it wasn't necessary.

I had thought of calling the Spanish edition "Mujer traducida," or "Mujer retraducida," keeping the title closer to the original English version. But Esperanza was always saying "Cuéntame algo aunque sea una mentira" in our conversations, "Tell me a story, even if it's a lie." I decided to use *Cuéntame algo aunque sea una mentira* as the main title and *Las historias de mi comadre Esperanza* as the subtitle. I could use the word *historias* in Spanish, which I couldn't use in English because it didn't make sense in English to talk about her "histories." I was able to recover that word in the Spanish edition. That expression "Tell me a story even if it's a lie" doesn't quite work in English either. But it's a popular expression in Spanish. The word *cuéntame* incorporates the word *cuento*, which can mean a story but can also mean an exaggerated tale, as in the phrase "Ay que cuentista" to refer to someone who tells made-up stories.

Returning to the Spanish allowed me to recover the original language of our conversations as well as Esperanza's unique vocabulary and phrasing. I am grateful for the work of the three translators who made it possible for Esperanza's story to exist in Spanish. I should add that, after being so insistent that her story only circulate *en el otro lado*, several years later, Esperanza decided she wanted the book in Spanish. She ceased to be ashamed and became proud of having told her story to me. She wanted her children to know her story too. A copy of the book in Spanish is kept by her youngest son as if it were a precious jewel. I stay in touch with him, and when he let me know she was ill, I traveled to Mexquitic for a last visit with

Esperanza before she passed away in 2014. I wrote a eulogy for her in an essay called “Goodbye, Comadre” (Behar 2015).

The only writing I translate into Spanish are my poems. With prose or longer works, I prefer to have a translator. I always check the translation to make sure it’s the way I want it to be.

Recently, with an essay (Behar 2019) that I wrote about Caro, who was my nanny in Cuba, I asked Eduardo Aparicio to translate it. He is also *cubano*, a Cuban American who I’ve known for thirty years. I’ve worked with him going back to the years when I edited *Bridges to Cuba*. He translated the essay beautifully, but there were a few words and phrases that I changed. He said, “Yes, you’re right, that’s better.” But the labor that it took to get that whole piece translated, it would have taken me much more time to do it than it took Eduardo. I like it when someone else does the translation and then I go back and tweak it, weaving in all the words that I want.

**RMZ:** Ruth, one last question that has to do with translation more in a general sense. And this is something that I thought about maybe because of my own perceptions and experiences—we always write from the self. The diaspora experience is such a central aspect in your life and work. To what extent could we think of translation as a form to survive (in) the diasporic experience? (I would even prefer using *sobrevivir* instead of survive in English, as it seems to get closer to *Überleben*, in the sense used by Walter Benjamin [1972] between quotes in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*.)

**RB:** This is such a deep question I don’t know if I can answer it at all. You mentioned Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish writer. One aspect of translation I think about is the Jewish context

of translation, where knowing more than one language was a form of survival. When a Jew could speak Yiddish or Ladino (the Spanish spoken by Sephardic Jews), you would have those languages of survival within your community, but then you would also learn the languages of the places where you lived—German, Turkish, Polish, Spanish, French, and so on—in order to move between languages. When you can speak and translate yourself into different languages, that gives you more possibilities for survival, including physical survival. If you immigrate somewhere, but you still have that other language of home, you can communicate in that language and it gives you the ability to stay connected to the place you left.

My mind went immediately to those ideas, because you mentioned Benjamin, but I think another aspect of survival is how we preserve and maintain different identities and cultures through their survival in our native languages. To the extent that I have kept Spanish, the Cuban experience of my family survives in me through language. To the extent that I passed it on to my son, who knows some Spanish, he knows our Cuban experience, too. When I'm gone, it's going to survive in him to the extent that he passes Spanish on to the next generation. The passing on of a language, even if it's fragmented, offers a connection to the past, to historical memory.

**RMZ:** Fragmented, but what isn't fragmented?

**RB:** That's right. What isn't fragmented? I think about lullabies. Just last night I was talking to a group of families about *Lucky Broken Girl*, and I said, "Well, one of the things that I learned very early on were lullabies in Spanish that my mother and grandmother sang to me"—*Esta niña linda que nació de día, quiere que la lleven a la dulcería*. That lullaby, I can't ever forget it. I used



to sing it to my son. That's a form of survival: the lullaby, *los cantos de cuna*, I love the expression—literally, stories from the crib. They survive, these everyday aspects of language, how you put a baby to sleep in a language that your family brought after you left your country. The smallest, most simple things, like lullabies, are part of a web of larger things, a whole culture that can survive in a language. I'm thinking about Ladino, and how that Spanish Jewish culture survived for five hundred years in this language, this old Spanish that had other languages mixed into it, including Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, but it was essentially a form of Spanish that was spoken after the expulsion. The Sephardim were no longer living in the territory of Spain, they had lost it hundreds of years before, but they had the language and they could carry that language wherever they went, because language is portable. Going back now to the symbol of the suitcase, language was something you could carry with you, and it didn't matter where you were, the cultural memory had survived in words. So we come back to words and to translation. People held on to Ladino through many displacements. The sad thing is how quickly that language began to be lost in the twentieth century, after surviving for hundreds of years. After millions of Jews were forced out of their homes in Europe, those that survived learned English in the United States, Hebrew in Israel, Spanish in Latin America, and Ladino fell away. There are still people who speak Ladino, but very few; it's now an endangered language. It might survive in music and in academic studies, but it's unlikely to survive as a colloquial language. And yet, for hundreds of years, people maintained it. So, there's survival but there's also loss. I think that's a topic for another interview. Don't you?

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Author Manuscript

## FIGURES CAPTIONS

**Figure 1.** *Isla de lágrimas/Island of Tears. A poem Ruth Behar dedicates to Rolando Estévez.*

*Matanzas, Cuba: 1995. Design: Estévez. (Source: [www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com))*



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**Figure 2.** Book Cover: Poemas que Vuelven a Cuba/Poems Returned to Cuba. Design: Estévez.

(Source: [www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com))



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**Figures 3a and 3b.** Nameless Poems/Poemas sin Nombre. *Five poems by Dulce María Loynaz and five poems by Ruth Behar in an edition of fifty handmade books. Michigan, 1998. Design: Estévez. (Source: [www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com))*



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**Figures 4a and 4b.** Everything I Kept/Todo lo que Guardé. Bilingual collection of poems in an edition of two hundred handmade books. Cuba: Ediciones Vigía, 2001. Design: Estévez. (Source: [www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com))



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**Figures 5a and 5b.** *La Cortada*. Bilingual edition of Ruth's short story in an edition of two hundred handmade books. Ediciones Vigía, 2004. Design: Estévez. (Source: [www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com))



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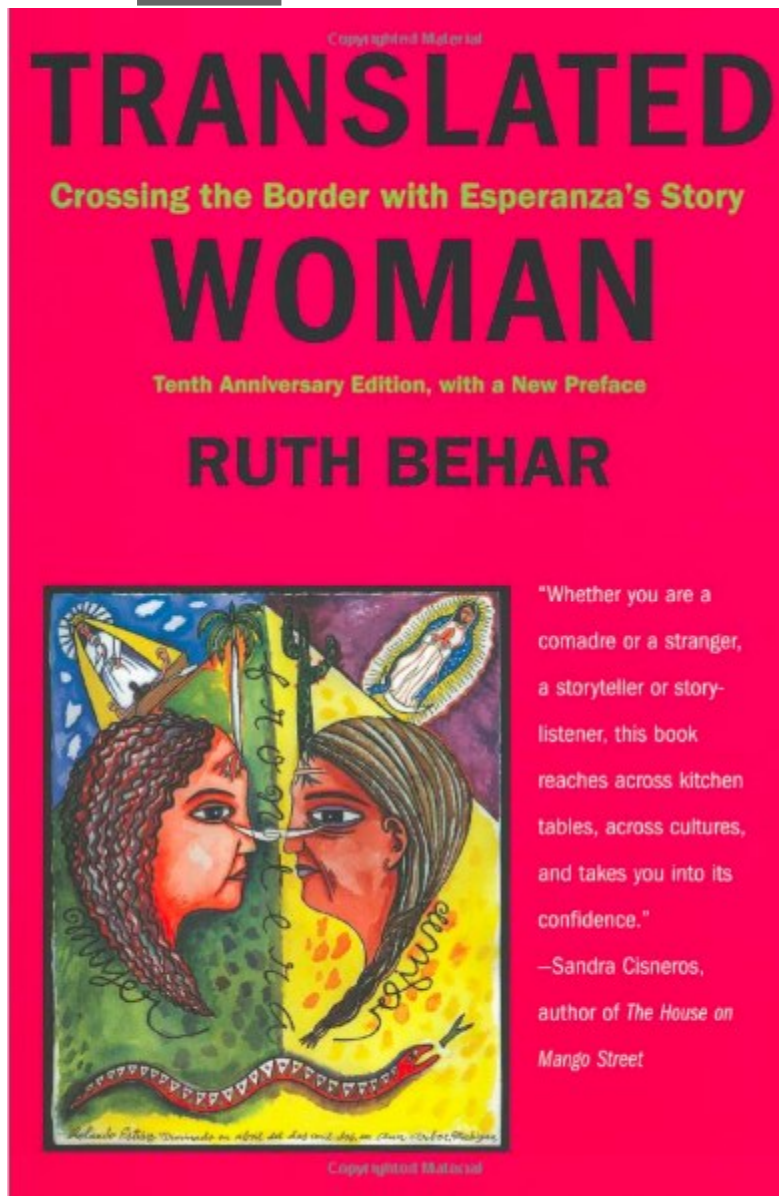
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**Figures 6a and 6b.** Un Cierta Aire Sefardí (A Sephardi Air). *Design: Estévez. (Courtesy of Ruth Behar)*



**Figure 7.** Illustration by Rolando Estévez. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, by Ruth Behar. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003)



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**Figure 8.** Illustration by Rolando Estévez, showing Esperanza and Ruth. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, by Ruth Behar. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003)



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<sup>i</sup> The bonds between anthropology and translation have been acknowledged and referred to countless times (how anthropology is submersed in modes of translation, and how anthropological discussions could influence translation theorizations by foregrounding translation's ethical dimensions and transformative nature). However, such a relation often seems to appear as secondary to the discussion of other matters. Besides this, something still not quite explored is the intersecting lines between anthropology and translation in their growing interest in forms of communication beyond verbal language. Within the field of translation, a compelling example is the notion of *paratraducción* (paratranslation), a term coined by the transdisciplinary research group Traducción&Paratraducción (T&P) at Universidad de Vigo (Spain), led by scholar José Yuste Frías. Such an idea has had original unfolding within cultural and identity studies in anthropological and translational reflections by Alexis Nouss (2005, 2007) about migration, *métissage*, and hybridism.

<sup>ii</sup> Her work includes *The Presence of the Past in a Spanish Village* (1986), *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993), *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba* (1995), *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (1996), *Everything I Kept/Todo lo que guardé* (2018), the documentary *Adios Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey* (2002), *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (2007), *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in Between Journeys* (2013), and *Lucky Broken Girl* (2017).

<sup>iii</sup> By linking this binary to the notion of translation, I am also activating some conceptual lines from anthropological perspectivism (as theorized by Brazilian ethnographer Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) and psychoanalytical approaches to literature (e.g., Shoshana Felman 2003). By making those interconnections, I allude to the zones of indeterminacy within the Other/self binary and to the impossibility of conceiving any sort of existence detached from alterity. The relation with the Other allows us to establish a relation with the self, which is, also, a particular

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case of Other (ideas defended in Viveiros de Castro 2011, 2015). Translation is a privileged space to delve into those complex relations, for it allows to unpack and rethink the interdependency between the always-set-apart categories. Ruth puts it differently, yet in an overlapping perspective, when she says there is a sort of mirror through which we look at each other, and at ourselves. It is at that moment when it is possible to disclose the alterity in our most intimate self as well as the striking proximity of the Other.

<sup>iv</sup> The word *fingimento* in Portuguese is close to the word “pretense” in English. In this particular use by Haroldo de Campos, it revendicates that translation is a transgressive process—not just transgressive in how it reconfigures the translator-author subjectivities and voices but also in how translation necessarily merges the real and the imaginary in a single space. By arguing that it is only through pretense that translation occurs, he detaches translation from the idea of fidelity and foregrounds its trans-figurative and creative dimensions as part of an artistic process.

<sup>v</sup> First stanza of the poem “Autopsicografia,” poem published for the first time in *Presença* in 1932: O poeta é um fingidor/Finge tão completamente/ Que chega a fingir que é dor/ A dor que de veras sente (Pessoa 1932). (The poet is a feigner/she feigns so thoroughly/ that she even gets to feign the pain/ the pain she really feels).

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