

The Female Narcotrafficker's Tongue | La Lengua de la Narcotraficante

Juan Llamas-Rodriguez

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This video is the first in a series of video essays on the female narcotrafficker, a character whose popularity has surged in the past two decades across film, television, and other audiovisual media. My series takes the popular figure as an agent to instigate ruminations on social themes recurring across its various media iterations. Its style replicates that of the popular media where the figure appears: thriller, melodrama, action. The female narcotrafficker has proven particularly popular in television shows in both English and Spanish across the Americas. The synthesis of linguistic variation and narrative serialisation found within this character offers the inspiration for the first video, 'The Female Narcotrafficker's Tongue | La Lengua de la Narcotraficante'.

Although the video ends with Gloria Anzaldúa's famous dictum on the revolutionary potential of speaking two languages and belonging nowhere at once, the spirit of this insight resonates throughout. I rely on language – as medium of communication and as symbolic representation – to play with the thesis of the video essay in formal ways. Its central conceit is to address an English-Spanish bilingual public, but included therein is the indirect address to an exclusively English-language one and an exclusively Spanish-language one. The sporadic use of subtitles means that viewers with different linguistic backgrounds understand several parts of the video differently. Monolingual audiences each receive a distinct version of the video's argument and may not clue into the video's deceit until it is visually presented to them near the end. Bilingual viewers may notice the mistranslations earlier, but subsequent viewings should reveal the mistranslations to also be a form of double address.

Bilingualism as double address threads a fine line between double consciousness (a strategy for survival) and the double agent (a strategy for betrayal). In Mexican and Chicanx traditions, the most prominent figure for this in-between position is La Malinche. As Alicia Gaspar de Alba explains:

La Malinche, or people who are labelled Malinches or Malinchistas, signifies betrayal to everything that the *vato*, the Pachuco, the *carnal*, and the 'homey' represent. In short, she is a traitor to Chicanismo. Chicanos did not invent this treacherous view of La Malinche. That was inherited from Mexican patriarchy and its 'colonial imaginary' [...] For [Octavio] Paz, the self-proclaimed guru of the Mexican mind, Malinche is '*la Chingada*', the violated mother, the seed of shame that every Mexican, but especially every Mexican male, carries inside him and that is, to a large degree, responsible for his Mexican fatalism and continued colonization. [1]

La Malinche's mainstream reputation posits her as the betrayer of the (male-coded) nation to outsiders, but she has been revitalised by Mexican and Chicanx feminists like Gaspar de Alba as a subversive feminine figure that dares to speak back despite and against patriarchal structures. The female narcotrafficker acts, in many ways, as a late modern Malinche figure. Emerging from the social exile prompted by being marked as a double agent, this figure mobilises her double consciousness to create a space for her own articulation.

The video essay reinforces the transmedial nature of its central figure by erasing the markers of each individual media text. The clips included in the essay draw from the Mexican television series *El Pantera*, US television shows *Weeds* and *Queen of the South*, and the Spanish-language telenovela *La Reina*

del Sur. The aim here it is not to analyse one television show but to trace a similar character across a number of shows, bringing its bilingual and bicultural iterations into conversation. Throughout the essay, I experiment with sound, image, and text in contrapuntal relations (via subtitling, mirror title cards, superimposed words, graphic and voiceover repetition) to test the kinds of conversations the character engenders. Still, the latter part of the essay focuses on the two media adaptations of *La Reina del Sur*, the international bestseller about globe-trotting narcotrafficker Teresa Mendoza, aka *La Mexicana*.

'Güero is dead. Get out of the house now.' The iconic phrase that kick-starts Teresa's saga remains the most direct linguistic translation between the two televisual adaptations, yet the distinct industrial context and generic conventions of these adaptations shape what and how the phrase comes to signify. In *La Reina del Sur*, the iconic moment showcases the telenovela's melodramatic elements by dwelling on Teresa's grief for a long time before she begins her escape. *Queen of the South* cuts to Teresa's escape faster because the drama series must condense the same amount of story in thirteen one-hour episodes that the telenovela covers in more than 60. Adopting the thriller as its main genre also influences the choice of fast-paced montage in the English-language adaptation. The contrasts in narrative and generic conventions provide different facets of Teresa at the outset – her loss and her resilience, both of which reverberate as the narratives progress. Ultimately, the visual comparison between the openings of both television adaptations illustrates the centrality of translation (of language, genre, and industry) as central to the understanding of the female narcotrafficker in general.

Author

Juan Llamas-Rodriguez is Assistant Professor of Transnational Media in the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. His research focuses on media theory, creative labor, border studies, infrastructure studies, and Latin American film and television. His work has been published in *Feminist Media Histories*, *Film Quarterly*, *Jump Cut*, and the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*.

Notes

- [1] Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]framing the 'Bad Woman'*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014: 65.