

Domesticating Gender: Localising the “We” in Translations of Maitena Burundarena’s *Women on the Edge*

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Maitena Burundarena, the most famous female comic artist in the Spanish-speaking world and arguably the only globally recognised Latina female comic artist, once described her work as “reírme de las cosas por las que lloramos las mujeres” [“laughing at the things that make us women cry”] (Mora). That comment, from an interview published on the eve of the syndication in Spain of Burundarena’s comic strip *Mujeres alteradas* [*Women on the Edge*], exemplifies how her work has been marketed to female readers in her country of origin, as well as in Europe and the United States, where her translated comics began to appear in the early 2000s. As in the comic strip itself, where a series of individual scenes of everyday life are clustered under taxonomical headings such as “The things we women hope to find at the beach” or “Those things we romantic women love”, Burundarena speaks of “we” when characterising her work, which to date includes three comics about women: *Mujeres alteradas*, *Superadas* [*The Obsolete*] and, most recently, *Curvas peligrosas* [*Dangerous Curves*].¹ Implicit in her prominent use of the first person plural is an assumption that women can speak as one.

As critic Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste points out, however, a cursory glance at Burundarena’s original work quickly reveals the fallacy in this universalising gesture: largely white, upper middle class, and obsessed with their looks and consumer culture, the women in Burundarena’s comics are far from representative of the average woman in Argentina or anywhere else. Similar criticisms have been made of shows such as *Sex in the City* in the United States, in large part for what Rebecca Brasfield calls the “hegemonic feminist narratives” (130) of its four well-off, white female characters. What has until recently been left unexamined, however, is how such universalising narratives of gender function on a global scale and, more specifically, how translation aids or thwarts the exporting of essentialist narratives from one culture to the next. In the case of translations of Burundarena’s comics,

¹Burundarena tends to use word play both within her comics and in her titles. *Mujeres alteradas* has been translated for US markets as *Women on the Edge*, whereas more literally it would be “Altered Women” or “Annoyed Women”. *Superadas* can mean both something overcome and something or someone outdated or obsolete. In interviews, Burundarena has said she took the title from something her conservative father used to say about women who were divorced or had children out of wedlock. *Curvas peligrosas* is easier to translate, as “dangerous curves” is a play on words that works in English as well.

what becomes apparent is a tendency to downplay the Argentine-ness of the comic and the comic artist herself in order to accentuate the purported universality of a female experience chronicled within its pages. Specifically, translations of the comic series *Mujeres alteradas* for readers in the United States and Spain, tend to erase the distinctly Argentine markers of the original text in two key ways: through changes to the comic itself and through the creation of paratexts and marketing materials that emphasise Burundarena's gender and deemphasise her country of origin. Mapping the ways in which translation bends narratives of gender to fit local markets offers up new ways of understanding how universalising narratives function in the global world, where a construction of female gender is increasingly exportable and commodified.

Translated Gender

To understand the exportation of universalising gender narratives requires a different critical apparatus than any normally employed in studies of translation. Localisation was for years a term used solely in business discussions of global commerce and markets, but as Anthony Pym argues, this concept has become increasingly useful in theoretical and practical discussions of translation in the global world. Unlike translation, localisation describes a team effort, "the adaptation and translation of a text", as Pym explains, "to suit a particular reception situation" (1). Such adaptations vary depending on the size and characteristics of both the source and target cultures and can imply a neutralisation of the foreign, as we see in Burundarena's work, or an accentuation of a work's foreignness. Though the term was traditionally associated with modifications made to digital media in their distribution to foreign markets, localisation has become a concept helpful for understanding the cultural adaptation of almost any mass-produced, modern-day text, including works of literature. While translation as the rewriting of a text in another language is still key to the distribution—and academic analysis—of foreign literature, it is becoming less convincing to discuss any text translated in the global world without reference to the team of editors and marketing professionals, whose job it is to make over that work and, often, its author before they are presented to a new audience.² Discussions of localisation then, allow for a widening of the critical aperture to include both those textual changes that are part and parcel of translation, as well as the myriad other ways in which a text has been packaged, marketed and adapted to suit a foreign audience.

Localisation is particularly helpful when considering issues of gender and translation, although it has been little used by feminist translation theorists until recently. This is perhaps because, understandably, the focus was on either the task of the female/feminist translator herself or on the process of translation from either a feminist or anti-feminist perspective. Much of the research dedicated to gender and translation to date has focused on gendered language within the context

²For an example of this, see the discussions of the translation and marketing of Japanese author Haruki Murakami's most recent book, *1Q84*, by Hegarty and by Gabriel, Rubin and Fisketjon.

of translation (Chamberlain), as well as on the gendered impulses of a translator that might affect everything from text selection to translation style (Simon; Maier). Those studies that address gender as a component of localisation tend to examine audio-visual texts or popular fiction, in particular romance novels. In her study of French translations of US and British “chick texts” (183), for instance, Anne-Lise Feral identifies translation as a tool for inscribing local gender norms and sexual mores on imported foreign products (in this case, the TV shows *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal*, and the book *Bridget Jones’s Diary*). She argues that, “both the translations of bestsellers and the dubbed versions of popular film/TV series tend to reinforce ideological centralization and project the homogeneity of the local system of moral values” (Feral 184). Meanwhile, Janet S. Shibamoto Smith, in her study of Japanese translations of Harlequin-style romances from the United States, has argued that such translations have the potential to provide “new spaces” within the guest culture: “The imported ‘messages’ about ideal heroines and heroes are not always flattering to Western-style lovers, but they provide alternative, and in the case of heroes, I would argue attractive alternative ways of imagining loverly behavior for the Japanese reader” (116). Both studies approach the topic of gender, sexuality and translation from the reception end, focusing on the target audience, and yet their conclusions are quite different: Feral sees the host culture as overpowering the foreign, while Shibamoto Smith finds a potential for change in the interaction between the host culture and the imported foreign text. What neither does, however, is examine how universalising narratives of female experience shape-shift as they move from one culture to the next. These authors’ respective foci on either the audio-visual or the purely textual also fail to address some of the specific factors at play in localisations of comics, which constrain the translator and thus the translated message.

Situating Comics

As products of popular culture historically used as tools of both regime indoctrination³ and social criticism, alongside their more explicit function as objects of entertainment, comics are particularly fertile sites for the examination of the localisation of gender narratives. Although the sequential art form may trace its roots from Lascaux cave drawings to the printed engravings of William Hogarth,⁴ the contemporary comic strip was a development of the satirical cartoons published in daily newspapers starting in the mid-1800s. In the decades following the birth of the funnies page, comics diverged into different sequential art forms, from graphic novels to manga, that can be locally, historically and culturally situated. In her book on comics in the Spanish-speaking world, Ana Merino emphasises the re-

³Comics were created in Nazi Germany and Castro’s Cuba, for example, as part of youth indoctrination projects aimed at teaching national pride and, in the case of Cuba, civic responsibility (Merino; Zanettin).

⁴Scholars and practitioners have offered various definitions of comics—Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, Tom Inge, Eduardo del Río, or Rius, to name but a few—and the differences in those definitions have led to various conceptions of the origins of comics as a medium.

formist qualities of this popular medium: “Hay que entender los cómics como forma cultural de la modernidad, capaz de negociar o crear espacios de diálogo, tensión y resistencia entre diferentes sectores sociales, dentro de lo subalterno y lo hegemónico” [“Comics need to be understood as cultural components of modernity that are capable of negotiating or creating spaces for dialogue, tension and resistance between different social sectors and within the subaltern and the hegemonic”] (16).

On the other hand, comics from *Donald Duck* to *Superman* have also been read as reinforcing existing capitalistic and nationalistic ideologies (Dorfman and Mattelart; Eco; Genter). Comics are alternately conservative and subversive then, depending on the critical perspective operating below the surface.

In the case of Burundarena, her comics have been characterised as both empowering to women and as disenfranchising them. Published as full-page panels, the comics in *Mujeres alteradas* feature a cast of mostly female characters, but also some men and children—there are no recurring characters—who nonetheless come to resemble each other across several pages. With the women, Burundarena may change the facial expression, age or hairstyle, but their bodies are often quite similar, as is their race: nearly all are light skinned. As such, Fernández L’Hoeste faults Burundarena for consistently excluding lower-class women, women of colour, and lesbians in her supposedly universal narratives of female experience and highlights how differing narratives of class, ethnicity and sexuality are elided in the stories of women’s lives that populate Burundarena’s comics. Gema Pérez-Sánchez, on the other hand, notes the satirical and subversive qualities of what she calls the Maitena “brand” (89). While acknowledging criticisms of Burundarena, Pérez-Sánchez also insists on her role as a feminist comic artist and as a rarity in Latin America. Likewise, Cynthia Tompkins argues that Burundarena’s comics are best understood from within the context of the feminist movement in Argentina and that, ultimately, her work is progressive rather than conservative (57).

These critics are primarily untangling the implications of Burundarena’s comics as they were originally published in Argentine Spanish; only Pérez-Sánchez addresses the global brand that Burundarena has become because of translation. This gap in the literature on Burundarena reflects the field: despite an increased awareness of the richness of comics for literary and cultural study, very little has been written about the translation of comics until recently.⁵ The earliest research, moreover, tends to fall into two limited camps: an analysis of wordplay and humour in comics or one focusing on comics as multimedia in nature and therefore requiring a “constrained translation” approach. As regards the former, the research has so far focused largely on the French-language comics *Astérix* and *Tintin*, two of the most translated comic series, both of which are directed primarily at children. Meanwhile, the latter strain of research, according to translation scholar Federico Zanettin, has been hindered by an undeveloped characterisation of the comic medium,

⁵In his 2008 book *Comics in Translation*, Federico Zanettin writes of the “relative paucity” of studies on comics in translation and notes that many of those articles address comics only in passing, focus entirely on the written text, or limit their analysis to the two French-language comics *Astérix* and *Tintin* (19–21).

one that stresses the linguistic elements of comics at the expense of their visual language:

The translation of comics is different from “translation proper” not only because words co-exist with non-verbal systems, but also because verbal language in comics is only part—if sometimes the only visible part (i.e. overt translation)—of what gets translated. From a descriptive stance, however, while the analysis can be focused only on the translation of the verbal component, it cannot dispense with an examination of how words interplay with pictures in the co-construction of meaning. (23)

One of the more recent and innovative takes on comics in translation situates a topic raised by Merino—that of differing comic traditions depending on the country—and marks it as foundational for a proposed comic translation practice. Austrian critic Klaus Kaindl calls for a social and cultural contextualisation of comics in translation that takes into account the local significance and history of the medium in both the source and target cultures (265). While this approach will not be the focus of the current analysis, it is worth keeping in mind differences in the culture of “women’s comics” in Argentina, Spain and the United States. In Argentina, as Fernández L’Hoeste,⁶ Pérez-Sánchez, and others have pointed out, Burundarena’s comics have been understood as successors to the popular and beloved comic strip *Mafalda* by Joaquín Salvador Lavado (known internationally as Quino).⁷ This lineage extends to Spain but, in that context, the popularity of Burundarena’s comic also owes a debt to female artists such as Asun Balzola, Ana Juan, and Ana Miralles, who in the 1980s helped break what had been a male stronghold on comic production in Spain (Pérez-Sánchez 89). In the United States, translations of *Mujeres alteradas* have been most often compared to other “women’s comics” such as *Cathy* by Cathy Guisewite, *Sylvia* by Nicole Hollander and, more recently, the lesbian comics of Alison Bechdel.

Packaging Female Experience

Originally beginning in 1994 as a weekly comic strip in the magazine *Para Ti* in Argentina, *Mujeres alteradas* was then syndicated five years later in *El País Semanal*, the weekly magazine of the Spanish newspaper *El País*, in Madrid, where it was first “translated” from the Argentine into the Peninsular Spanish dialect. The comic never appeared in US newspapers or magazines as a syndicated strip. Instead, it was collected in book form and released in six volumes by the Penguin imprint Riverhead Books. This article focuses on the first collected edition of *Women on*

⁶Fernández L’Hoeste notes: “To many she is the rightful heir to Joaquín Salvador Lavado, also known as Quino, who is respected by many as the master Argentine cartoonist and creator of ‘Mafalda,’ perhaps the most popular Latin American comic strip ever” (346). He then goes on to argue, however, that when put side-by-side, only the setting of the two comics (the urban landscape of Buenos Aires), their focus on everyday life, and their relative popularity link the two comic artists.

⁷Other Argentine female comics artists of Burundarena’s generation include Patricia Breccia and María Alcobre.

the Edge, a volume that corresponds to the first two years of the comic strip published in *Para Ti* and therefore provides a comprehensive and representative range of storylines and characters from the source series. Examining the collected volumes also allows for an understanding of how paratextual elements such as book blurbs or cover design are reconstructed during the localisation of this comic in a new setting. These paratexts, in addition to marketing and newspaper interviews aimed at promoting the books, are in some ways as important to the process of localisation as translation-based changes to the text itself. Promotional material online for the translated comics, for instance, contextualises *Women on the Edge* as a book that “American women—especially *Sex and the City* fans” will love, while book jacket blurbs for the American-English translation stress the universality of its depiction of contemporary women: “Maitena understands women”, the back of the first collection reads. “Her observations are exquisite, precise, hilarious, honest, compassionate, universal.” The first edition of the comic in English was also printed with a pink cover rather than the red cover used in its Argentine counterpart. This colour change arguably marks the book as more stereotypically female for the US reader, a marketing decision that localisers may very well have considered advantageous for branding the book as “chick lit” in the United States.

Beyond paratextual changes, there are also dozens of small ways in which Burundarena and presumably her publicist sought to market her work to an audience in the United States. In an interview with the *New York Times* before the release of the English translation of the first volume of her comics, Burundarena explained her broad appeal: “Women are not all the same, but the same things happen to us. I talk about solitude, separation, falling in love, anguish, failure, success, children, universal themes that everyone experiences” (Rohther). Two years later, she repeated much of the same message to the *Los Angeles Times*:

I speak a lot of what we women feel within ourselves, what a woman feels when she leaves her child in day care and goes to work, what a woman feels when she puts on her favorite jeans and they don't fit, or a woman returns home from work tired and sees her husband reading the newspaper. (Johnson)

The thrust of these interviews and promotional blurbs is to reposition the foreign presence of Burundarena within a familiar context for English-speaking readers—thereby replacing her othered image with an image of the self.

In Latin America by contrast, part of Burundarena's fame is tied to the fact that she was the first—and arguably the only—high-profile female comic artist in the region. That reputation extends to Spain, as there is a history of literary exchange between Spanish-language authors on both sides of the Atlantic. In Spain, interviews with Burundarena and marketing material for her comics rarely take the time to explain or introduce her. This does not mean, however, that her Argentine identity is made clearer to Spanish readers than it is to readers of her English-language comics. Interviews with Burundarena in the country's largest daily newspaper, *El*

País, reference her place of birth in parenthesis, as is the custom in Spanish newspapers, but tend to characterise her either as Latina in a general sense or as a global and therefore markedly unforeign persona. In one *El País* article, for instance, Rafael Fraguas identifies Burundarena as an Argentine comic artist, but then adds that she also has a Basque surname and looks like an Italian woman who would fit in well in Barcelona. The focus in these articles and interviews is still almost entirely on Burundarena's gender and the appeal of her comics to women in general, though as we shall see, this almost always actually means a specific set of ideologically situated women.

Reading Between the Jokes

In addition to considering cultural context, Kaindl proposes a list of elements specific to the medium that should be considered when discussing the translation of comics (273–74). These elements include everything from font type and size to colour choices, vignette style and, of course, dialogue boxes and language use. Kaindl's ideas are particularly helpful in considering how gender narratives are localised in translated comics. In the original publications of *Mujeres alteradas*, for instance, gender is communicated in a number of ways: through the linguistic elements (such as the comic titles), the narrative voice (described as “sassy” by the *New York Times*) and dialogue between characters. The physical images in the comic also gender characters. This is most notable in the depiction of women, who are often shown as either looking distraught (Fig. 1) by anything from heartbreak to cellulite or, alternatively, made serenely plastic by cosmetic surgery (Fig. 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

Meanwhile, other visual elements such as motion lines and even the hand-drawn style of the frames around the comic's individual panels aid the reader's overall interpretation of the text. Motion or movement lines can characterise a female character as nervous or angry, in love or looking for love, while the use of handwritten-like type and vignette boxes instead of typed font and hard lines marks the comic

as personal and informal, both characteristics that contribute to the ways in which the text as a whole is gendered for its target audience. Settings and props in Burundarena’s comics also play a role in how the female characters are defined. Domestic scenes are common, with characters often either in a bed, near a kitchen table, or standing in front of mirrors; telephones, scales and drinks appear frequently, while paperwork, offices and crowds of people do not.

It follows that translations of *Mujeres alteradas* must be read at both a linguistic and graphic level. Although neither the US nor Spain versions altered the images of the comic in translation, changes to the dialogue or subheadings of *Mujeres alteradas* at times adjust the way a corresponding image is read. In one particularly telling comic, “Seis de las cosas que hacen sentir mal a una mujer” [“Six things that make a woman feel bad”] (Fig. 3 and 4), the second-to-last panel shows an upset woman vehemently scrubbing her hands with soap. The narrative box in the original explains that this “cosa” [“thing”] that makes a woman feel bad is “oler a lavandina” [“smelling of bleach”], a reference that is kept the same, with a different word used for *bleach*, in the Peninsular Spanish version (8). The English translation, however, removes *bleach* and substitutes it with *onions*, and as a result the US reader is given to understand that smelling of onions, rather than smelling of bleach, is one of the six things that can make a woman feel bad.



Figure 3: “Seis de las cosas...”



Figure 4: “Six things...”

One possible reason for this change is that in the United States, onion breath is commonly seen as offensive while smelling of bleach is not. Regardless of the reason for the change, the result is that, although the image used in source and

translation is the same, our reading of the woman’s anguish changes depending on where we are reading the comic. The end result is a shift in both our understanding of the joke itself and our reading of the image before us. A universalising narrative of women’s experience is thus quite particular and locally produced, a revelation that only comes from examining source and translation side-by-side.

Substitutions such as this are one of the key strategies in both the English and Peninsular Spanish translations for removing Argentine cultural markers from the texts and replacing them with references that the target reader would arguably consider more natural or normal. Food references are a common site for substitution because of how locally situated food is in culture. “Milanesa con papas fritas”—a breaded and fried fillet with chips—in the Argentine and Peninsular Spanish version, becomes “spaghetti and meatballs” in the US translation (11), while “omelette” in the original, becomes “tortilla”—a fried dish made of eggs, potatoes and onions—in the Peninsular Spanish version, and in the English version is changed to “soufflé”—a dish that arguably has little in common with either the *tortilla* or *omelette*, except that it is made from eggs and would be familiar to the target reader (16). These changes are not overtly gender specific, but each aids in recreating a familiar world that then allows for the localisation of universalising gender narratives. Likewise, in another comic originally published in the Argentine context, titled “Temas de conversación característicos entre quienes no tienen nada que decirse” [“Topics of conversation when there is nothing to talk about”], one panel shows two men talking about the cost of electronics in Miami and Paraguay while their girlfriends/wives look on in annoyance (Fig. 5 and 6) (73).



Figure 5: “Temas de conversación. . .” Figure 6: “Topics of conversation. . .”

The English version, however, has the two men mentioning the same subject in relation to China, a shift in geography that ostensibly allows the joke (about the annoying conversations of men) to make more sense to a female reader in the United States. This change, while seemingly unrelated to gender, is in fact key to exporting the myth of universal female experience. By recreating not just a familiar female character in each of these comics but also a world that its readers inhabit, *Women on the Edge* effectively removes foreignness that might distract US readers or cause them to read the comics as anything other than familiar and universal.

Other substitutions in the localised text touch directly on the construction of the female experience within the comic. In a segment titled “Las seis injusticias más machistas del culto a la belleza”, translated into English as “Six great beauty injustices”, for instance, one panel shows a man and woman presumably naked in bed with the covers pulled up to their shoulders (Fig. 7 and 8).



Figure 7: “Las seis injusticias...”



Figure 8: “Six great beauty injustices”

The narrative box for the panel reads “Los hombres pueden estar llenos de pelos, pero las mujeres tienen que ser porcelanas” [“Men can be full of hair, but women have to be porcelain”], which is rendered with flair in the English translation as “Men can be hairy brutes, but women have to be china dolls” (23). This change only nominally affects our reading of the comic, however; what alters it notably—and intimately—is the change made in the dialogue box. In the original, the man is shown saying “. . . hay algo que me raspa, amorcito . . . cuánto hace que no vas a la depiladora?” [“. . . something is itching me, my love . . . how long since you’ve been to the hair remover/waxer?”], while the English version reads, “There’s something scratching me, hon . . . When was the last time you shaved your legs?” In the Ar-

gentine original and the Peninsular Spanish version, the man references a common cultural practice for Argentine and Spanish women, of going to a beauty parlour to have leg hair and pubic hair waxed. In the English version the reference is limited to the legs and to a common cultural practice in the United States of women shaving their own legs. The shift in meaning is slight but important, in that it communicates to the reader an imagined cultural norm of female existence, a norm that we can easily see in comparing the text's shifts as it moves from one location to another.

To understand other changes made in localising *Mujeres alteradas*, it is helpful to consider Antoine Berman's twelve common "deforming tendencies" in translation (244), most of which can be identified to some degree in the two translations studied here, especially the American-English version. Of particular interest to this analysis is Berman's idea of quantitative impoverishment, which he defines as "lexical loss" (247). Quantitative impoverishments are common in the English version of *Mujeres alteradas* and significantly less so in the Peninsular Spanish adaptation. Three of the most striking examples of omissions occur in the vignette titles: in the English version, the translated titles consistently omit the use of the first personal plural "we", as well as, in some cases, the words "mujeres" ["women"] and "machista" ["sexist", "male chauvinist"] (Fig. 7 and 8). A title in the source text that reads, "Los seis dolores que suelen aquejar a una mujer" ["The six pains that usually afflict a woman"] is de-gendered in the English translation to read "Six common aches and pains" (14), while another title that reads "Los cosas que tenemos que manejar las mujeres para demostrar que no somos estúpidas, a través del tiempo..." ["The things that we women have to handle to prove that we're not stupid, over time..."] becomes simply, "Things women have had to master to prove they aren't stupid, as time goes by", with the "we" removed and replaced with the more distant third person (20). These changes in the English adaptation might on the surface appear antithetical to the thesis that both localisations analysed here aim to present *Mujeres alteradas* as a universal story of women's woes. However, the argument could also be made that, through the excision of these specific words, *Women on the Edge* becomes more representative of what US women expect from a "woman's comic". Although comic strips such as *Cathy* and *Sylvia* focused on the female world, their narratives feature the limited perspective of a single female character who is not positioned as representative of American women in general.⁸ Similarly, the omission of a translation for the Spanish word *machista* in the English adaptation can be understood in a number of ways. For one, the word *machista* has a different cultural connotation in Latin America than either the words "sexist" or "male chauvinist" do in the United States. The English variants, for instance, are arguably less common in everyday speech, but more accusatory than *machista*. Likewise, there are cultural differences in the way sexism works in Argentina, Spain and the United States, as well as differences in the ways that

⁸The closest possible equivalent in the US-American context is the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* by Alison Bechdel, which features lesbian characters and situations that are meant to be read as representative of lesbian culture in the United States.

sexism or machismo is discussed. The common use of the term *machista* in both the original *Mujeres alteradas* and its Peninsular Spanish adaptation indicates a colloquial quality to the term in these cultural contexts that arguably does not exist for comparable terms in the United States. By refusing to use the word “sexist”, then, the US version inscribes the Argentine comic with a narrative of female experience and even female empowerment that is more palpable to the reader in the United States. This is a version that may criticise gender inequalities, but prefers to do so without calling anyone names.

In addition to these significant changes in the versions of Burundarena’s comic, there are small excisions that prompt a more universal reading—though at the cost of specificity. In one panel, for instance, a female character is on the phone with a friend and she references a specific Argentine women’s magazine, *Para Ti*. In the Peninsular Spanish version this reference is changed to *Marie Claire*, a French magazine also published in the United States and Mexico, whereas in the US version the title of the magazine is removed and the reference is simply to “the magazine” (31). In other scenes, details such as the name of a CD (“Prince Mega Hits”) or the first name of a grocer have been omitted in the English version (20). The latter might reflect the absence of a tradition of neighbourhood grocers in many parts of the United States. A final example of qualitative impoverishment is the decision for the American-English translation to remove honourifics in much of the dialogue between members of different classes; so while in the Argentine source a maid addresses her employer as “Señora” before telling her that she is quitting, in the English she simply says she is quitting—without an equivalent address incorporating “Ms.” or “Mrs.” or “Ma’am” (17). This is particularly significant because it addresses the differences in perception of class in the United States and Argentina, specifically the tendency of US-Americans to think of theirs as a classless society.⁹ The removal of the honorific in the English translation effectively de-emphasises a reference to class distinctions that might distract the ideal reader in the United States.

From Spanish to, Well, Spanish

In most of the examples discussed here, the Peninsular Spanish version has proven to be either equal or a close equivalent to the source text made in Argentina. So how exactly are gendered narratives localised within the Peninsular Spanish context? When changes occur for these readers, they are most often subtle shifts. In fact, a comparison of the original Argentine and the later Peninsular Spanish version reveals few wholesale changes to the content. Instead the difference is semantic. Much of the slang has been changed, for instance. The word *genial*, a common word in Spain for “great” or “cool” replaces the Argentine word *bárbara* (or *bárbaro*); while *vieja*, a colloquial term that literally means “old woman” but is also a Latin American reference to one’s mother, becomes “madre” [“mother”]

⁹Examples of this abound in academic literature and the media. For a brief comprehensive summary see Reeves.

in the Peninsular Spanish version.¹⁰ In addition, verb tenses and pronouns shift slightly when the comic crosses the Atlantic. For instance, in Spain, the present perfect is used more often than in Argentina and, as a result, in the adaptation of *Mujeres alteradas* for readers in Spain, instances of the simple past in the original are often replaced with the present perfect tense. The Argentine *vos*, an informal second-person singular form used in parts of Latin America, is also removed in the Peninsular Spanish version and replaced with *tú*, the informal second-person singular form used in Spain. Likewise, the second-person plural form *ustedes* is replaced by *vosotros* in the Peninsular translation. The adaptation of *Mujeres alteradas* for readers in Spain, while most often retaining the same or similar cultural references, makes changes to the way the comic is read; by translating the Argentine dialect to a Peninsular Spanish one, localisation creates a more familiar and less foreign reading experience for the Spanish reader. The Argentine voice of the comic has been so thoroughly removed in fact, that as Pérez-Sánchez explains, readers and critics from Spain have at times mistakenly identified Burundarena as a Spaniard (94).

What is most significant about the Peninsular Spanish localisation of *Mujeres alteradas* is that it exists at all. In her analysis of Burundarena's work, Pérez-Sánchez proposes that the adaptation of the comic to the Peninsular Spanish dialect suggests "un deseo editorial de borrar las diferencias locales y lograr que el trabajo de Maitena se venda al mayor número de lectores posibles" ["a desire on the part of publishers to erase local differences so that Maitena's work might sell to the greatest number of readers possible"] (94). Spaniards have long been aware of and able to read literary and popular texts in the Argentine and other Latin American dialects, just as an audience in the United States can, with minimal effort, understand a British television show or novel. In fact, *Mafalda* was published in Spain without any change to its distinctly Argentine dialect. Pérez-Sánchez proposes that readers in Spain were drawn to *Mafalda* in part because that comic read as distinctly Argentine, i.e. foreign. This is in line with a tendency Heike Elisabeth Jüngst highlights in German translations of Japanese manga. Readers of manga, she writes, want their comics to look and feel Japanese and, as a result, translations of Japanese comics are often printed right-to-left like the sources and Japanese terms are left untranslated in the text (74). Both *Mafalda* and manga translations, in fact, are examples of a foreignising strategy in localisation: when the foreign qualities of a text are accentuated (or exoticised) as a means of adhering to expectations (or anticipated expectations) of foreignness on the part of the target reader.¹¹

¹⁰In her analysis of the Peninsular Spanish translation of Burundarena's comics, Pérez-Sánchez lists additional examples, including "chaqueta" for "remera" and "tía" for "mina," changes that she argues, "despide[n] un leve tufillo neocolonialista español" ["stink slightly of Spanish neocolonialism"] (94).

¹¹Valerio Rota writes about foreignising strategies with regard to comic book formatting, noting that "This strategy is mainly adopted in countries (like Italy, France, and Spain, for instance) where the reading public has developed an awareness of the artistic importance of comics and where, consequently, drastic alterations of the original works (a domesticating strategy) would not be viewed in a favourable light" (85).

So why was *Mafalda* fetishised as a foreign object and Burundarena's comics are not? Why was the American-English adaptation localised in the way it was—with certain phrases omitted and others substituted? And what do these decisions mean about the practices of localisation and gender in these two cultural contexts? As Pym explains, the size of a market in part drives localising trends. The US market is big enough that British television shows are regularly recast in new versions—from *Sanford and Son* to *The Office* and *Queer as Folk*—that adhere to US-American dialect and cultural norms, including Americans' sense of humour. Pym adds, however, that when it comes to localising decisions, "the calculations also account for the various degrees of resistance involved" (6). Those cultures or communities that are more resistant to the foreignness of a book or a video game might demand that the product be localised to their tastes and language. It is this second factor that opens up new avenues for considering gender and localisation. In the case of the adaptation of *Mujeres alteradas* for Spain, one could argue that it was not just the general Peninsular Spanish market, but the specific market of female readers in Spain, that was considered sufficiently resistant to foreignness to warrant the adaptation of *Mujeres alteradas* to their dialect.

The Last Laugh

As Judith Butler reminds us, gender is never a fixed identity but instead a negotiated performance, a construction that takes place discursively, one that is malleable and mutable depending on cultural context and language. As such, gender, language and culture are intrinsically linked; whenever "we women" are discussed in a universal sense, that "we" is articulated using a single language and contextualised according to a localised set of cultural references that are understood from a specific culturally situated perspective. In other words, a "we" that universalises women does so by making invisible other factors such as ethnicity, culture and language, which also contribute to our performance of gender. Because the idea of a universal female experience is in itself an impossibility, any text that relies on the propagation of this myth must blind the reader to those traces of the other, be they in terms of dialect, class, sexuality or ethnicity, all of which, as markers of identity, reveal the mechanisms of that myth.

The strategies translators use—or the strategies employed by teams of localisers—have the potential to reveal or conceal the performative nature of gender and gender narratives in a text. As Xie Ming notes in his essay on translation in the global Chinese context,

The notion of translation is [. . .] of intrinsic importance to the very idea of totality or universality and to the politics of cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. Judith Butler has convincingly argued that the assumption of a "common language" between diverse languages and cultures is questionable, because such a language is frequently evoked and conceptualized in a hegemonic and imperialistic way to assimilate a "variety of languages to a dominant notion of speech." (29)

In considering gender as both a performance and, in the globalising world, as the basis for a market group, we can begin to approach the issue of localisation and gender from a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective. This essay has explored how competing understandings of the so-called female experience are transferred across borders. The examples cited here depict some ways that cultural differences have been neutralised—and a specific gender representation emphasised—as a means of accentuating a mythical universality of female experience.

The universal “we” implied in the translations of *Mujeres alteradas* is achieved by positing a “common language” shared between women and a unified culture of women: their speech, their lives, the things that “make us women cry”, as Burundarena puts it. To convince readers of this myth, translations of the comic seek to erase markers of the foreign and add ideological frameworks that readers in the host countries will recognise as familiar and thus “true”.

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