

# *María, llena eres de gracia*

by Joshua Marston

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# *María, llena eres de gracia*

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- Introduction and plot summary
- Main characters
- Discussion on the main themes

- A 2004 US-Colombian co-production.
- Written and directed by Joshua Marston (Colombian).
- Marston also directed *The Forgiveness of Blood* (2011) and *Completely Unknown* (2016).
- Why do you think the film poster stresses the idea: “Based on 1,000 true stories”? What is the director’s objective here?
- The film is a realist drama. The director’s objective is to portray the reality of many Colombians, using María’s story as a representative example.
- What play on words is being made with the title “María full of grace”? What is the source of this cultural reference?
- In Catholic tradition the Virgin Mary is full of grace because she is pregnant and carries God’s son. The main character of this film, María, is also pregnant but, in addition, she carries cocaine in her stomach.

María lives in a small village near to Bogotá (Colombia) and works on the production line of a rose plantation. She leaves this job due to the pressure and unjust treatment that workers receive there. She needs to find a new job as soon as possible because her family is in a difficult financial position and she has just discovered she is pregnant.

After talking to her boyfriend, she meets Franklin, who offers her a lucrative deal working as a drug mule. Although María initially hesitates, she decides to talk to the trafficker and finally agrees to carry little bags of cocaine inside her stomach from Colombia to the USA.

She is accompanied on the mission by her friend Blanca who went along with her unwittingly, and by Lucy, a girl who has done the job before and who offers help and advice. After the flight (and an interrogation in which the police almost find out that María is carrying drugs), the three girls get through customs control and meet the traffickers. It is agreed that the drugs will be passed over once the three girls have expelled the bags from their bodies in the natural way! However, Lucy starts to feel unwell and one morning disappears, leaving only blood stains in the motel bathroom. María and Blanca suspect that the dealers have killed Lucy to extract the drugs from her body after a bag had broken inside. María and Blanca then escape with the cocaine and ask Lucy's sister (who lives in the USA) to help them without telling her the whole story. When she discovers Lucy is dead she kicks them out. María and Blanca then decide to return the drugs to the traffickers and María spends part of her payment on returning Lucy's body to Colombia. At the end of the film, María decides to stay in the USA and start a new life.

- **María** [*Catalina Sandino Moreno*] is 17 years old, is a rebel, and does not accept being treated unfairly. Her rebellious perspective on life and strong personality cause conflicts with her family (her mother and her single-mother sister), with whom she lives in a small house and in difficult financial circumstances. She does not accept that she should not take her own decisions or just accept social norms unquestioningly. She is therefore not interested in getting married to her boyfriend when she discovers she is pregnant, as ultimately she does not love him.
- Even when she gets involved in criminal activity, María has her own system of values and she feels responsibility towards Lucy, paying to bring her dead body back to Colombia. María's situation evolves from a context of no hope in Colombia to that of opportunity for her and her new baby in the USA.



Min. 36:36



Min. 41:01

- **Blanca** [*Yenny Paola Vega*] is less confident than her friend María and follows her blindly. She gets involved in the drug carrying operation without really knowing what the consequences might be and doesn't even seek advice from anyone. She dreams about buying a house for her family.
- **Lucy** [*Guilied López*] already has experience of carrying drugs and helps María. Her sister lives in the USA but she does not go to visit her because she knows that what she is doing will disappoint her and she feels guilty about it.



Min. 1:17:25



Min. 33:10

- **Franklin** [*John Álex Toro*] is kind and seductive towards María. He tells her about an "easy" way of making money and puts her in touch with the traffickers. He is part of the drug trafficking network and enlists people to carry the drugs, taking advantage of the fact that they have financial problems.
- **Carla** [*Patricia Rae*] is Lucy's sister and represents the Colombian emigrants in the USA. She is kind and generous with María and Blanca because they are Lucy's friends, but also because of the network of mutual support and solidarity that has been created by emigrants. Carla has struggled to create a new life in a new country but nothing is comparable to the happiness of being with her loved ones in Colombia. She stays in the USA because she wants a better life for her son.



Min. 22:29



Min. 1: 11: 57

1. Discuss in pairs and list the key themes of this film.
2. When María tells her mother and sister that she has left her job, her mother talks to her about getting a decent job and repeats ironically, “a decent job”. How do you think María feels about her work situation?
3. What are María’s feelings towards her baby? What does the baby symbolise at the end of the film?
4. What is the relationship between María and Franklin like, and the relationship with the man she does the deal with to carry the drugs? What is the two men’s attitude towards her (and the other girls)?
5. Why does María put her life at risk getting involved in the dangerous business of drug trafficking?
6. Why do Carla and Mr Fernando help María and Blanca even when they don’t know the two girls personally?

- This film shows the **economic crisis** in Colombia.
- Young people do not have the opportunity of a good life because of poverty.
- María and Juan could not get married (even if they wanted to) because they would not be able to get their own house and create a family without help.
- Most people stay in alienating jobs with low wages as it is their only option.
- María questions that an alienating job is a decent job.



Min. 7:26



Min. 17:00

- Poverty favours **drug trafficking** as traffickers take advantage of people in a desperate situation.
- The dangerous deal seems like an easy way of getting money at the beginning.
- The traffickers are kind, in a paternalistic way, to the women who will work as drug mules, pretending that they care about their financial problems. However, they also make it clear that they will hurt their families if something goes wrong with the delivery.
- This criminal network puts the life of the mules in danger, revealing another way that poor people in Colombia are exploited.



Min. 41:19



Min. 40: 04

- The film also represents a **sexist society** where women face a harder experience as they have to struggle with extra difficulties, such as getting pregnant in a context of economic crisis and violence.
- María's family is composed of three generations of women who raised their family without the help of any men > The men in the film do not assume their responsibility as fathers and partners.
- María's boyfriend refuses to move to her house because he thinks it would be shameful for him > In the patriarchal society portrayed in the film a woman has to move to the house of her husband.
- In the factory, a male manager is in charge of the female workers and he does not treat them as people but as a workforce, and he addresses them with little respect: "rapidito, niñas, rapidito" he shouts.
- The traffickers see the women who work for them only as containers, as objects. These women put their life at risk but the main profit from this dangerous activity is for the traffickers, they are the owners of the business.

- **Emigration** is the other side of the coin of the economic crisis in Colombia. There is a large community of Colombian emigrants in the USA [“everybody knows someone here”, Carla says]
- The film shows a network of solidarity between those emigrants. Carla brings María and Blanca to see Mr Fernando, who helps Colombians to find accommodation and a job.



Min. 1:16:42



Min 1:15:01

- Slides 3 to 1 screengrabs: Paul S. Mezey (Producer) & Joshua Marston (Director) (2004) *María, llena eres de gracia* [Motion Picture] US-Colombia: HBO Films / Santa Fe Productions.

¡Gracias por vuestra atención!

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