

bakgrund och diskussionsunderlag

# guldburen

## la jaula de oro

en film av  
Diego Quemada-Díez

### Directors statement:

The social reality in Latin America requires cinema to be deeply engaged with the world as it is. I am interested in making films firmly rooted in our contemporary society. True realism has it all: fantasy and reason, suffering and utopia, the happiness and pain of our existence. I want to give voice to migrants – human beings who challenge a system established by impassive national and international authorities by crossing borders illegally, risking their own lives in the hope of overcoming dire poverty.

This film is not a documentary, rather it is a fiction based on reality, reenacting it from a place of authenticity and integrity. We constructed the narrative and poetics of this odyssey from the testimony of hundreds of migrants and from the personal sentiments of each and every person who participated in the creative process.

As we identify with Juan and Chauk, we depart from our own daily lives and embark on a grand emotional adventure that delivers us to profound discovery – a journey dispelling the notion that happiness awaits us in a distant place, a journey offering reflection on the borders that divide nations, a journey towards awareness of what separates us as human beings.

We made this adventure in the hope of deconstructing those conventions that imprison us so we can reinvent our own reality. My dream is that these boundaries that separate us dissolve, allowing us to board another train. One whose destination doesn't matter, a train whose passengers all know our all existence is interconnected, a train whose obstacles inspire us to celebrate our existence with respect and conscience that transcends nationalities, races, classes and beliefs.

The words of a Mexican man named Juan Menéndez López, spoken just before boarding a moving cargo train with seven of his companions, remains on my mind, "You learn a lot along the path. Here, we are all brothers. We all have the same need. What's important is that we learn to share. Only in this way can we move ahead, only in this way can we reach our destination, only a united people can survive. As human beings, there is no place in the world where we are illegal."

Interview with director Diego Quemada Díez\*

*What's the story behind La Jaula de Oro?*

In 2003, I had read an article about a red-light district in Mazatlan, and in a totally irrational move, I took a plane there, looking for my next story to tell. Once I got to this part of town, I met a taxi driver, "El Toño", in one of the clubs there, and we became friends. I ended up living two months in his house, which was situated right next to some railroad tracks. Every single day, a convoy of train cars packed with migrants would arrive. These guys would hop off and come knock on the door asking for tortillas and water. They would tell us these terrible stories – how they were travelling with nothing, how they were robbed of everything on the way.

Many died; nevertheless, they chalked it up to experience with the idea they would be making money and sending it to their families, sacrificing their lives for the people they love. It seemed to me that they were heroes that their stories were like epic poems, their journeys metaphors for life - an extreme dramatization of human existence. I then spent several years collecting the stories from migrants. I met some wonderful people who taught me a lot of things, including generosity and the value of brotherhood.

I really fought to make this story feel real as well as for it to have a dramatic structure. I went over it again and again. Maybe that's why it took me so long to finish it. I wanted to make it a cross between documentary and fiction, but getting this right is complicated. In the end I realized that what I needed to do was to concentrate the testimonies I had compiled in a kid.

The research process took place in a number of places in countries where migrants leave from, as well as in the United States takes in migrants for the cheap, manual labor it needs to keep the wheels of industry turning.

*What themes do you explore in the film?*

In many poor villages in Central America and in Mexico it seems that to embark on the adventure of risking your life going to the United States is like an initiation. For a lot of kids it's like being pulled out with the tide, like a current that drags you northward. They simply imitate what they have seen with their parents and relatives.

I also wanted to call into question social, national and racial barriers. We are all equal, we all have the same needs, the same dream of a better life. Migration is natural and borders artificial, created by humans not so long ago. Another theme I address is the western obsession with progress and the fact that we don't know where it's leading us. We give so much attention to materialism, but what about spiritual and human development?

Behind migration there is colonization, behind that there is the expulsion or extermination of a people. One person or a group that occupies the land of another to exploit it and to exploit others. We have a long history of conquests, from the Romans to the Spanish, the English, the Aztecs; we've spent centuries trying to dominate one another via wars and occupations that continue to this day, just like in Iraq and Afghanistan. I ask myself what political and business leaders are actually talking about, to what freedom do they refer when the only thing they truly value is greed and personal enrichment.

Maybe it is time to conquer one self instead of conquering others. A poet with the Guatemalan art collective Caja Lúdica told me that what we must do is de-colonize our mind: if my goal is to take advantage of you, to use you, I am never going to change society; we must turn inward, ask ourselves, "What do I have inside of me that tries to control others?" There is where the transformation begins. It is about having dominion over one's self, leaving behind our greed, aggressiveness, egoism and the tendency to think of others as our enemies. We must begin to work together.

*One of the main characters in La Jaula de Oro comes from the Tzotzil culture. What did you want to reflect in your film that brought this particular people to your attention?*

The name Chauk comes from my Mayan friend Chak. He taught me their cosmogony; a different way of seeing things. He gave me the book “Canek” by Emilio Abreu Gómez, a poetic gem that has both idealism and romanticism and yet filled with realism. I asked myself, “How can I try to capture and communicate the wisdom of his people, so connected to the land, with the spiritual and poetic side of existence?”

Chak told me that his grandfather used to ask him questions that pulled him out of his everyday way of thinking. For example, “What do clouds dream?” The first time you ask yourself this, you want to answer correctly, and, really, there is no adequate answer. He could tell you, “the dream of the cloud is to play with the fish in the river and end up in the sea,” The trick is seeing beyond the physical, to provoke a poetic vision of existence, to give the universe another dimension, not the materialistic one where there is logic to everything, and everything is a chemical or physical reaction. In the end, “What is the truth? I rather life’s mysteries”

*Talk to us about the opposition between Juan and Chauk, the leads of the film.*

At one point it occurred to me to create a counterpoint for Juan, this character who dreams with getting to America no matter the consequences, someone who still believes in the American dream, that wishes to succeed in a materialistic society, with Chauk, who thinks in a totally different way, in more of a community mindset, more conscious of his connection to the land, to the value of goodness. This way you create a clash between the two that gives way to a growth, a change in the one who is more egotistical.

Little by little his armor falls away. He is transformed into someone different. He realizes that individualism is an illusion; a lie told by society, alone we can do nothing. Another interesting thing about this structure of opposing worlds is that Juan represents the rational, the mind, and Chauk, the heart, the feeling. Over the course of their journey, Juan learns to feel. I wanted people to consider the content of the Tzotzil greeting, “K’uxi elan avo’onton?” (How is your heart?), to communicate on a more emotional level than just a mental processes. I think that inside all of us there is one part that is more like Juan and another that is like Chauk.

*What can you tell us about the metaphors present in the film?*

The train is a metaphor for progress, a fundamental part of the assembly line in an industrial structure; it carries all of the raw materials need to feed the great machine and, in the most dehumanizing way possible, bringing cheap and utterly disposable labor. Migrants live in slave-like conditions within a system that proclaims to champion democracy and liberty.





### Diskussionsunderlag

- La jaula de oro är ingen dokumentär, men en berättelse nära verkligheten. Hur precist kan du placera filmens handling? Var möter vi först filmens karaktärer, och hur rör de sig? Hitta platserna på kartan. Vart slutar resan för var och en av dem?
- Juan kommer från zona 3 i Guatemala City (ciudad de Guatemala), även kallad "Basurero". Vad är det för område och hur är livet där?
- Varför lever så många i fattigdom i Guatemala? Vad är landets ekonomiska förutsättningar sett till klimat, jordbruk, naturtillgångar, export etc?
- I Sverige används ofta "Amerika" eller "amerikansk" slarvigt som synonym till USA och USA:s befolkning. Vad är egentligen Amerika? Vilka stater ingår i Sydamerika, Centralamerika respektive Nordamerika? Vad menas med "the american dream" och vad tror du att USA symboliserar för olika människor runt om i världen? Vad symboliserar USA för dig?
- Majoriteten av de migranter som försöker ta sig till USA kommer från Guatemala, Honduras och El Salvador. För att nå USA behöver de ta sig igenom Mexiko. Det är farligt, av många anledningar. Vilka faror framkommer i filmen? Vilka direkta och indirekta hot finns från myndigheter/maktinstanser? Från kriminella grupperingar? Från andra migranter?
- På gatorna i filmen ser vi lappar med efterlysningar av människor som saknas. Vad har hänt dem? Bakom varje lapp finns anhöriga som lever med traumat och ovissheten. I filmen, liksom i verkligheten. Vad menas med att vara "papperslös"? Ge exempel på konsekvenserna av att människor lever utanför systemet: för individen och för samhället?



- I sin presentationsscen går Sara in på damernas toalett, klipper av sig håret och maskerar sig till pojke. Varför? Minns du vad hon svalde? Hur skiljer sig riskerna för pojkar och flickor, män och kvinnor, på flykt?
- Guatemala har hård abortlagstiftning och abort är bara tillåtet när kvinnans liv är hotat av graviditeten. Lagförslag om att kriminalisera missfall och dödfödsel återkommer upprepat. Vad betyder abortlagstiftningen för Sara i filmen? Vad betyder det för verkliga kvinnors rätt till självbestämmande och möjlighet till arbete, utbildning och förvekligande?
- Chauk, som ansluter till gruppen i Chiapas, tillhör Tzotzilerna och pratar inte spanska. Det finns en utbredd rasism gentemot ursprungsbefolkningen, som kommer till uttryck genom Juan i filmen. Vad är rasism? Diskutera varför rasism uppstår, psykologiska förklaringar, vi-och-dom-mentalitet, stereotypisering, samhällseliga och politiska ageranden? Vad menas med strukturell rasism?
- Hur framställs tåget? När det kommer förstärker ljuddesignen upplevelsen av dess kraft. Hur är känslan när tåget kommer emot oss? Hur förändras känslan beroende av var kameran befinner sig? Migranttåget kallas i folkmun "La Bestia" ("The Beast"), kan man i filmens bildspråk skönja hur tåget både skrämmer och fascinerar? Finns det en känsla av triumf i att (tillfälligt) tämja besten?
- Filmen tillkom utifrån fler än 600 intervjuer med verkliga migranter. Under inspelningen fick skådespelarna inte läsa manus i förväg utan fick varje inspelningsdag tillgång till den del av historien som de skulle arbeta med. Varför, tror du?
- Läs på om situationen idag; har Donald Trumps utlovade mur mot Mexiko och påtryckningar för att stoppa mänsikor från att ta sig in i USA förändrat läget i Mexiko och Centralamerika? Hur, i så fall? Och vad väntar dem som lyckas ta sig in i USA? Finns det någon möjlighet att få stanna? Att få jobb och boende? Vad kan menas med en "bur av guld"?

