

UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

Volume 13
Number 1 *Forum Theme: Re)presenting
(Im)migration*

Article 4

3-2018

Interview with Beatriz Gallardo

Stephen J. Gaies
University of Northern Iowa

Polly Alfano Translator
University of Northern Iowa

Jennifer Cooley Translator
University of Northern Iowa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/universitas>

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you](#)

Copyright ©2018 Stephen J. Gaies, Polly Alfano (Translator), and Jennifer Cooley (Translator)

Recommended Citation

Gaies, Stephen J.; Alfano, Polly Translator; and Cooley, Jennifer Translator (2018) "Interview with Beatriz Gallardo," *UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity*. Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 4. Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/universitas/vol13/iss1/4>

This Forum Theme 1 is brought to you for free and open access by UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.



Interview with Beatriz Gallardo

Part of the journal section “Forum: (Re)presenting (Im)migration”



Stephen J. Gaies, Translated by Polly Alfano and Jennifer Cooley “Interview with Beatriz Gallardo”

Note to the Reader: Stephen Gaies’s interview with Beatriz Gallardo begins after the sixth paragraph. Questions by Gaies have been bolded to distinguish them from Gallardo’s answers, which have been kept in normal type print.

1. Film has been a powerful tool in documenting and raising awareness about (im)migration. It can reveal the root causes of population movement, both voluntary and involuntary, and it can open our eyes to the economic, social, legal and psychological challenges of newcomers.
2. Beatriz (Bea) Gallardo Shaul has been involved as a film producer in bringing these issues of (im)migration to the attention of the general public and in preserving a record of the impact of these issues on the people of Guatemala. Gallardo earned a Masters in Communications from San Carlos University in Guatemala (cum laude). Her credits as a film producer date from 2003, when she was associate producer of the television documentary *Guatemala 9.11.03: The Human Face of a Civil Celebration*.
3. Gallardo’s most significant work as a producer has been with two film trilogies. She was a producer of *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (2011) and *500 Years: Life in Resistance* (2017), the second and third of Pamela Yates’ Guatemalan trilogy that began with the 1983 film *When the Mountains*

Tremble. She was also a producer of the related film project *Dictator in the Dock* (2013) and *Granito: Every Memory Matters*, a multimedia archive project created to supplement *Granito*.

4. The other trilogy that Gallardo has produced is Luis Argueta's three films about Postville: *abUSed: The Postville Raid* (2010), *ABRAZOS* (2014) and *The U Turn* (2017). Whereas Pamela Yates' Guatemalan trilogy explores human rights abuses and justice in connection with indigenous people in their home communities, the Postville trilogy looks at the precarious existence of Guatemalans in small Midwestern communities in Iowa and Minnesota, as well as in their places of origin in Guatemala. Together, the two trilogies are powerful testimonies of the relationship among human rights, migration and justice.

5. Bea Gallardo was a producer of *Crime Hunters* (2014), *Mother Tongue* (2015) and a 2016 episode ("Guns and gangs") of the television series *Traffickers*. She is one of the producers of the ongoing multimedia project *When We Were Young/There was a War* (2015), which tells the stories of adults who grew up in the 1980s during the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador.

6. Gallardo has also been an independent consultant for BIRF (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) in the area of Human Development and International Cooperation for FONAPAZ (National Fund for Peace) and for the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education on Multicultural Resources Study. She is an advisor to the San Carlos University Outreach Office and Development and an independent producer for University TV USAC.

7. How did you become a film producer in Guatemala, which has quite a small film industry (and was, I believe, even smaller when you began studying film)?

8. I would visit my sister at her job at the University of San Carlos de Guatemala. Once while I was there I found out that they were developing a university television project. It was 2002, and back then I didn't have a job and I didn't have a clue about how to find a job related to what I'd studied. I majored in international relations. I met the people working on that project and little by little, I joined in. I became a volunteer. I started practicing with a video camera, learning the film and television jargon, and understanding every detail of video production. Later on, an opportunity arose to study film and television production in a series of courses designed to train the crew that would ultimately run TV USAC [the University of San Carlos television station]. I worked for several years at the university in executive production and I organized extracurricular academic activities to promote and publicize film and television production to the public. Thanks to our efforts, the First Ibero-American Film and Television Conference was held in 2003. That's where I met producer and director Luis Argueta, with whom I became a close friend and have been a coworker ever since. In the year 2003 in Guatemala, very few people worked in film production—you could count them on one hand. I think it's still not a thriving industry. Its progress toward becoming established has been slow, but sure. Even though there is still no formal legislation approved, the fact that the Guatemalan Ministry of Culture and Sports has opened a Film Bureau says a lot about the advances we can expect to enjoy looking forward.

9. What are the roles of a producer of independent films? How are these roles different from those of a producer of large studio films?

10. Well, I could say that being an independent film producer forces you to work on a million things at once and challenges you to be yourself. You become the motor that drives the film's production. I don't have experience working in big film studios, so I don't have a way to compare.

11. Most of your work in film production has dealt with human rights and social justice issues. Was it your interest in these issues that led you to a career in film production?

12. Maybe it was circumstantial, and yes, some personal interest was involved since I've always been at the forefront of what's happening in Guatemala in terms of human rights and social justice activism. By the end of the twentieth century, important changes in the politics and society of my country were in motion. We were going through a post-conflict period (we're still going through it, I believe) which was a situation I thought was important to document, and stories with universal values should be told. After the Peace Accords, Guatemala was opening up to the world, and a new era was underway.

13. How did you become involved in the Skylight Production films focusing on the Guatemalan genocide? What were the most significant aspects of that work for you as a film producer and as a person?

14. I remember very well when I met the Skylight team. The first person I met was the editor Peter Kinoy, and it was during the celebration of the Festival Icaro VI in the year 2003--the most important international film festival in Central America. We had a friend in common--Luis Argueta--who introduced me to Kinoy. A few days later, I met Pamela Yates, the director, in the presentation of her documentary *When the Mountains Tremble (Cuando las montañas tiemblan)*, produced in 1983, and publicly released for the first time in Guatemala during that year's [2003] Festival Icaro. A few years later, I received a phone call from her, inviting me to participate in the production of what was going to be the sequel to her first documentary, which was later titled *Granito de Arena (Granito: How to Nail a Dictator)*. Then, while I was working on that production, I met Paco de Onis, the executive producer. I've always been interested in learning about genocide in depth, both in the world in general but also, especially, in the context of Guatemala. Participating in that production was memorable for me--a unique experience--because I immersed myself in learning about genocide and universal social justice.

15. How did you become involved in the Postville film trilogy with Luis Argueta? What were the most significant aspects of that work for you as a film producer and as a person?

16. I remember it was the summer of 2008 when I received a call from New York, from Luis Argueta. The first thing he told me was, "Bea, you will not believe what Professor Erik Camayd-Freixas wrote in his essay *'Interpreting after the Largest ICE Raid in US History: A personal Account.'* This is something that everyone in Guatemala has to see. I want to translate his essay and get it published. I'm heading to Postville, Iowa with Vivian Rivas to see what's going on there." That same year, a few months later, Luis was returning to Guatemala to accompany some of the (migrant) women from Postville, and from that moment on, I was involved in the production of *AbUSED: The Postville Raid*, and then the two following documentaries of his trilogy--*ABRAZOS* and *The U-Turn*. The most

significant thing for me about participating in the production of these documentaries was becoming aware of the plight of Guatemalan migrant families living in the United States and the economic situation that had forced them to emigrate. I live only an hour away from San José Calderas and El Rosario [the hometowns of many of the migrant families that lived in Postville], and I had no idea how close to home the immigration phenomenon hit me. Later, while studying my family ancestry, I realized that migration is a facet of my own personal history. My maternal great-grandfather emigrated from Asia Minor to Guatemala at the end of the First World War, possibly for the same reason that motivates people to emigrate now, “looking for a decent life.”

17. The films you’ve worked on have portrayed the plight of Guatemalans targeted by their own government or trying to establish themselves in the U.S. How do you feel that film can assist people at the mercy of government and other powerful interests, either in their own country or in another country?

18. The story of *[AbUSed: The Postville Raid](#)* perfectly portrays the devastating effects of a raid of such magnitude and reveals much of the human suffering, and the consequences for the economy and the social cohesion of a community. The Postville raid taught us important lessons about injustice, discrimination, workplace abuse, and exploitation, but it has also served bring out the best in solidary people who see the immigrant as a fellow man, as a brother. The key is to realize that migration has always been a part of human lives and that it is a basic right. Migration will continue to exist for as long as we’re on the planet, and cannot be regulated or ended by walls and restrictive government policies. I think that the governing bodies and powerful interests are well aware of this. What we need is more solidarity, and learning to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, to see migrants with different eyes. By seeing the story, we learn from our mistakes so that we don’t make them again.

19. What was your reaction to the recent (December 20, 2017) commutation by President Trump of the sentence of Sholom Rubashkin? Have you heard from or about the reaction of any of the Guatemalans who worked at Agriprocessors?

20. I was surprised by president Trump’s decision because, to me, it carries a very specific symbolic meaning, even though Mr. Rubashkin was serving a sentence for bank fraud and not for immigration charges, meaning that special or personal interests have greater importance than collective interests, the pardon exposes the many nuances involved in “justice.” I don’t know the reactions of the migrants that were working at Agriprocessors. Although I’ve recently met with some of them, I think this news is not part of their day-to-day concerns. Even though the memories of the raid are painful, and emotionally it’s hard for them to talk about it, I think that because of the demanding pace of their daily lives they can’t stop to reflect on these matters.

21. What does the Postville trilogy say about immigration in general?

22. The trilogy shows the human face of migration. It teaches us that there is something more beyond the statistical data. When we talk about thousands or millions of undocumented people in the United States, they are cold figures of a scope sometimes unimaginable to the general public—but it’s our neighbor, our coworker, our own family. And we must realize this. It’s also about us, as a community, as a country, as a region, as a continent, as one humanity.

23. Would you agree that documentary film is becoming more and more prominent? Is it because we seem to be more conscious than ever before that our communities and our world are beset by political, social, public health and environmental issues?

24. Yes, I agree that every day it's becoming more prominent. Migration will always be a thing of the past, the present, and the future. It lives in our everyday lives without us realizing it sometimes, and it has a great deal of complexity.

25. What projects are you currently undertaking? What projects would you like to begin if the opportunity arises?

26. I'm still involved in projects related to immigration, human rights, and social justice. I'm participating in several interrelated projects linked to these issues, not exactly filming documentaries, but offering support to the best of my abilities for groups of returning emigrants, facilitating their communication, and backing them through technological tools to promote awareness. I also seek funding to produce stories of migrants' lives. I am very interested learning about the lives of children who were born in the United States and then had to be displaced into the poverty of Guatemala with their deported parents.

27. What would you say to young people who want to go into filmmaking? What are the greatest challenges, and what are the greatest rewards?

28. I tell young people to look around them, their homes, their neighborhood, their community, and to try to uncover the stories surrounding those places. I tell them that observing is important, and learning to listen too, and that from those experiences, stories emerge. Great challenges will always be present; I can't point to one or more in specific terms because everyone has their own way to confront them. But I can tell them to be strong, compassionate, and to live in solidarity with others, to have faith in themselves, and to be very patient. The best rewards will be invisible, immeasurable, and can be felt in our hearts and minds.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

