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Tempestad

Tatiana Huezo

Producer Nicolás Celis, Sebastián Celis, Pepe Cohen, Joakim Ziegler. **Production companies** Pimienta Films (Mexico City, Mexico), Cactus Films (Mexico City, Mexico), Terminal (Mexico City, Mexico). **Written and directed by** Tatiana Huezo. **Director of photography** Ernesto Pardo. **Editor** Lucrecia Gutiérrez-Maupomé, Tatiana Huezo. **Music** Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman. **Sound design** Lena Esquenazi. **Sound** Federico González Jordán. **Executive producer** Jim Stark.

DCP, colour. 105 min. Spanish.

Premiere 13 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

World sales Cinephil

A group of innocent people is charged with human trafficking and thrown into prison. The authorities announce they've dealt a blow to organised crime; the public is reassured. "Pagadores" are what the victims of such procedures are called in Mexico. In her second feature documentary, Tatiana Huezo has a young mother recount her journey through hell: innocent, robbed of her liberty, she's handed over to those for whom she's being made to atone – in a private prison controlled by the Gulf Cartel.

Tempestad is a road movie: 2000 kilometres by bus from Matamoros to Cancún, through a blustery, overcast, bleak country. Inspections by martial-looking men armed to the teeth, omnipresent fear. A country mired in an invisible war whose front lines are equally invisible. The viewer never sees the protagonist but just hears her voice. The images create space for our own imagination and help us digest the monstrosity of the account. When they create identification, they're deceiving us, for they're inviting us to think of other stories, other destinies. The film itself recounts one of these, the story of a circus performer who has lost her daughter. A necessary cut in a film of tremendous force.

Christoph Terhechte

What fear means in the life of a human being

I have known Miriam, the protagonist of *Tempestad*, for twenty years. We have shared all kinds of experiences, joys and sorrows throughout our lives.

She has always struck me as a strong, inquisitive and rebellious woman, possessed of an unusually intense *joie de vivre*.

Miriam was imprisoned in a very violent jail in northern Mexico. She was accused of human trafficking even though there wasn't a single piece of proof to demonstrate her guilt.

When she got out of prison and we met again, I felt that something vital in her had died. Miriam couldn't look me in the eyes. And although, on that occasion, we spoke of simple, everyday things, she had a facial tremor that she could not control.

Shortly after that meeting, a package arrived at my house, posted from Cancún; it was from her. It was a box full of scraps of paper she had written on while in prison: poems in which she vomited out all the fear and sorrow of her experiences. The darkness and sadness in her words struck a chord in both my head and my heart. Never before in the twenty years we had known one another had I seen such a dense shadow cast over her, such a profound, immeasurable wound.

My perception of the damage that had transformed Miriam brought me into violent proximity with my own fragility, my own fear.

I proposed to Miriam that we should work together to make a film using her story, and she agreed to share her testimony with us. She told me that breaking her silence about the violence she had suffered in jail returned to her a sense of her own life.

This film explores what fear means in the life of a human being, and what it is we lose when those who cause us to feel that fear go unpunished.

A second voice

Parallel to the process with Miriam, I embarked on an in-depth research project to seek out other stories that could, in some way, be intertwined with Miriam's, accompanying the testimony of this film with a second voice. That was when I met Adela, a woman from a circus background who was looking for her vanished daughter. Adela conveyed to me, with the same force as Miriam, the irreversible transformation her life had suffered. Ten years before, her daughter Mónica had left home for university and had never returned. The ineptitude of the authorities and their collusion with the criminals have made Adela and her family doubly victims. They have now gone into hiding after receiving threats, and continue to search for Mónica alone, trying to stay sane despite the uncertainty over whether their daughter is alive or not.

When it came to the formal construction of *Tempestad*, I decided that the narrative device should be a journey across Mexico from north to south. The story therefore begins in Matamoros, northern Mexico, evoking the day on which Miriam was set free and began her journey home, more than 2,000 kilometres away. I followed the route she took, travelling on buses, stopping at sleazy hotels, bus stations and on the highways of Mexico – these days full of police and military roadblocks.

The fact that we do not see the image of Miriam in the film but only hear her voice was one of the most crucial formal decisions in the construction of *Tempestad*. As a result, in this case, her voice is not related directly to a single face but to many faces along the way, creating the sense that what happened to Miriam could happen to anybody living in Mexico today.

I believe that in this country, somebody else has taken control of the course of our lives, of our future, of our desires and our dreams.

The story of Miriam is intended as a mirror in which we can see ourselves reflected not only in her pain and fragility, but also in the dignity displayed by her and the other characters along the way, all of whom – in different ways and from different standpoints – resist accepting that they must live with the fear created by the violence in Mexico.

Tatiana Huezo



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Tatiana Huezo was born in 1972 in San Salvador, El Salvador, and raised in Mexico. She studied at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) in Mexico City and has a master's degree in Creative Documentary from the Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. Along with her work as a filmmaker, she also teaches documentary filmmaking at the CCC. After a couple of short

documentary and fiction films, Tatiana Huezo made her first feature length film *El lugar más pequeño/The Tiniest Place* in 2011. *Tempestad* is her second feature-length film.

Films

1997: *Tiempo Cástico/Caustic Time* (10 min.). 2001: *El ombligo del mundo/The Core of the Earth* (28 min.). 2005: *Retrato de Familia/Family Portrait* (45 min.). 2011: *El lugar más pequeño/The Tiniest Place* (108 min.). 2015: *Ver, Oír y Callar/See, Listen and Be Silent* (10 min.), *Ausencias/Absences* (29 min.). 2016: *Tempestad*.