

MATRONAS



A FILM BY

SHARA LILI & NOEMÍ DELGADO

28 mins / Color / 2021 / Spanish & English Subtitles



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FILM FESTIVALS & AWARDS

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SYNOPSIS

Salvadoran midwives, who delivered babies even during the Civil War, now fight to protect their ancestral role in the face of government repression. As people in El Salvador lose their right to give birth at home, dehumanizing hospital experiences become the standard way of ushering life into the world. The caretaking traditions of these midwives are at risk of being lost to future generations.



DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

There is a global birthing crisis, with birth-givers around the world being stripped of their autonomy when they enter the hospital. The situation in El Salvador is exacerbated by the repression of midwives in an already precarious reproductive health landscape. Midwives in El Salvador have been progressively pushed out of the nation's formal healthcare system, despite a growing body of research demonstrating the positive impact that midwives have on maternal health in Latin America.¹ Instead of being recognized as a resource for community-based reproductive and maternal care, midwives have been forced to operate under very constricted conditions since 2011, when the government announced that all home births are prohibited.² Despite the harsh criminalization of their work, Salvadoran midwives continue to provide life-saving services to people in their communities.

¹ Zepeda, Adán y Jorge Romero. "Promoción Del Empoderamiento De Género En La Población Indígena En Querétaro, México, a Través De La Difusión De La Salud Reproductiva Por Parte De Las Parteras." *Estudios Sociales (Hermosillo, Son.)*, 2012, 20(40), 293–312.; Llamas, Ana y Susannah Mayhew; "The emergence of vertical birth in Ecuador: An Analysis of Agenda Setting and Policy Windows for Intercultural Health." *Oxford: HealthPolicy and Planning*, 2016. 31(6), 683–690.; "Cuidar la salud, salvar vidas : El estado de las parteras en el mundo" *Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para las Actividades en Materia de Población*, 2011. New York: UNFPA.

² Ministerio de Salud. (2011). *Plan estratégico nacional para la reducción de la mortalidad materna perinatal y neonatal 2011-2014*

The filming of this story grew out of an intimate relationship between the filmmakers and the midwives featured, and has been shaped by a shared desire to raise awareness about birthing justice. Noemí, who grew up between El Salvador and the United States, began asking around about midwifery in her family's community, in Chiltiupán, La Libertad in 2018 after doing a research project about people's birthing experiences in the hospital system in El Salvador and finding wide-spread instances of physical and emotional abuse of birth-givers. People in the community talked about an elderly woman high up on the hill who used to attend births, and that pregnant women still go to her for "sobadas"—an Indigenous prenatal massage technique that can help a baby get into the optimal position for birth. The woman who lives on the hill is Cecilia, who would become one of the main characters of the film.

We believe this story is important to tell not only for El Salvador, but also for the globally relevant insight it provides us as birth becomes increasingly medicalized everywhere. If birth becomes the exclusive realm of hospitals, we lose access to traditional birthing practices which integrate our connection to the natural world from the moment we enter it, and which center women's agency. In contrast in hospitals, nonconsensual chemical induction of birth and medically unnecessary c-sections are more and more common. This documentary brings into question the idea that ancient Indigenous wisdom is outdated and thus in opposition to scientific progress. The midwives of *Matronas*, many of whom are in their late seventies and eighties, safeguard an extensive body of knowledge about important technologies for a safe and empowering birth, such as plant medicine, gravity, the moon, corporal intuition, and emotional support. These technologies are in danger of being lost if the government continues to persecute midwives in El Salvador, making training of younger midwives rare. In a moment when hospitals around the world are running out of resources in the face of a global pandemic, when the for-profit biomedical establishment is revealing its limitations, we must recognize the healers, the herbalists, the midwives who have been keeping their people healthy for centuries. This is a time to strengthen the localized resources that already exist within our communities. We must create medicine that brings us closer to the earth, to the moon and to each other.

- Shara Lili and Noemí Delgado

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Shara Lili is a Hungarian-American filmmaker based in California. She studied the history of modern social movements and revolutions at Stanford University. She has produced and edited hundreds of commercials and corporate documentaries for clients including Tesla, Google, Nike, SanDisk, and Western Digital. She executive produced and edited the narrative dramatic short film Inamorata, which premiered at Blackstar and on Issa Rae Presents.

Noemí Delgado is a doula and health educator living between California and El Salvador. In 2019, she won a Public Health Fulbright Research Award to work with la Asociación de Parteras Rosa Andrade in Suchitoto, El Salvador. In addition to providing prenatal support with the midwives, she conducted an oral history project to document their stories. She is passionate about spiritual healing and reproductive justice for her community. She is co-founder of the collective Cuidando a Las Que Nos Cuidan.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Directed and Produced by Shara Lili & Noemí Delgado

Composer Ábel MGE

Vocalist Yulu Wek

Vocalist Sound Engineer Francesco Cañas

Illustrator Judith Umaña

Director of Photography Shara Lili

Editor Shara Lili

Color Timer Will Smith

Sound Supervisor Ryan Young

Sound Effects Mixer Koren Young

Community Members Featured

The Alas Family

Dinora Cabrera

María Chicas

Nohemy Coreas

Alba Alas Guardado

Fatima de Hernandez

Soccer Team F.C. Feminino Zacamil II

Organizational Support

Asociacion de Parteras Rosa Andrade, Suchitoto

Cuidando A Las Que Nos Cuidan (www.cuidandoalas.org)

Asociacion de Parteria Indigena y Comunitaria (ASPARINCO) (www.facebook.com/aparinco)

Casa de Colores, El Zonte (www.facebook.com/casadecoloreselzonte)