

ON THE LINE

America's Deportees

Press items

A film by
Alex Gohari and Léo Mattei

Produced by Emmanuel François and Alice

Mansion 2020

TECHNICAL SHEET

Original title – ON THE LINE, les expulsés de l'Amérique

English title – ON THE LINE

A film by: Leo Mattei and Alex Gohari

Length: 68 minutes

Editing: Matthieu Besnard

Original soundtrack: Antoine Berjeaut

Picture: Leo Mattei

A production: Brotherfilms

With the participation of France Télévisions and Public Sénat

With the participation of CNC and the support of PROCIREP - ANGOA

Producers: Emmanuel François and Alice Mansion

Year of production: 2020

Format: HD

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LOGLINE 1

Every year, over 100,000 Mexicans are deported to their countries of origin by the U.S. administration. Many of them, however, have grown up or built their lives in the United States.

It is the case of Richard, Rocío and Sergio. After exhausting all legal recourses, they were deported on the other side of the border to Tijuana.

LOGLINE 2

Every year, over 100,000 Mexicans are deported to their countries of origin by the U.S. administration. Many of them, however, have grown up or built their lives in the United States.

Richard, Rocio and Sergio have been deported after a ruling which verdict is without appeal. They now live in Tijuana, on the other side of the wall.

SYNOPSIS

In Tijuana, thousands of Mexicans are deported every year from the USA. For decades, some of them have lived, worked, paid taxes and started a family on the other side of the border. Mothers and fathers living in the USA end up finding themselves separated from their children for decades.

This border town has become an airlock between two worlds where the broken lives of migrants end up. South of the wall, paths of reconstruction are winding and the spiral of exclusion is ruthless for those deported from America.

Every year, over 100,000 Mexicans living in the USA are deported to Mexico by the USA. Richard, Rocio and Sergio were deported after a ruling which verdict is without appeal. They now live in Tijuana, behind the wall.

PITCH

Contrary to the situation displayed, America only deports foreign criminals – these “bad hombres” pointed out by Donald Trump – to justify a zero tolerance policy against illegal Mexican immigration. The administration is required to hit its targets. Illegal workers, who have spent most of their lives in the United States and whose children are U.S. citizens, are now also targeted.

This forced return is what constitutes the plot of the film, with all it entails of violence, hardship, and trauma. The film follows the personal journey of three deportees, focusing on their feelings at their return to Mexican soil after years of exile. In this journey, the daily struggle of their families on the other side of the border comes into play. In the United States these families must go on living, without a father, a mother, or a companion. Their daily lives, struck by an administrative decision, will never be the same again.

ON THE LINE tells the intimate story of a geopolitical reality. This film reveals a border that shatters destinies, tears families apart and leaves persistent traces.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film is a natural extension of our work on migration in Central America. With **ON THE LINE**, we want to question the violence of the mass deportations process carried out by the American administration. The border between the United States and Mexico plays the central part: how can a thin line of demarcation, which arbitrarily finds itself there, have such consequences on human lives?

We have been living in Mexico for five years, walking along the desert border that separates this country from the United States, and we have had to face up to the fact that the profile of the new deportees from America does not correspond in any way to the figure of the "bad hombres", those foreign criminals pointed out by Donald Trump in order to justify an aggressive policy towards immigrants.

The deportees we met are exiles in their own country. Many are Mexican only by birth: a woman deported after working for 30 years in Texas, far away from her children born American citizens; a man deported after years in California prisons, pure product of the Los Angeles ghettos; a veteran of the U.S. Army who now survives in a pad Tijuana...

The first of these meetings was decisive: Martha, 45, had just been deported. She was distraught, terrified. She clung, shaking, onto her American cellphone. It was now the only remnant of her former life from which she would now be separated by one of the most guarded borders in the world. She was speaking in English, her voice strangled with sobs, with her eldest daughter on the other end of the line, across the border. Martha's eldest daughter is a U.S. citizen and a soldier in the U.S. Army...

But this enrollment did not prevent his mother's deportation. The feeling of injustice is tremendous. On the phone, the discussion centered on how to tell his younger sister, still a child, of his mother's departure. How to explain she was not there anymore? How to explain that her mother would no longer live next to her? How to explain that a political decision would separate them, perhaps forever? The violence of this heartbreaking scene, this human picture, had something immediate to it. Through their pain we fully apprehended the violence of a migratory policy.

The very evening of our meeting, Martha got on a bus heading to the south of Mexico. We never saw her again. For several months we asked ourselves the following questions: what had become of her? Does she maintain a connection with her children? How does she adapt to a country that is no longer hers?

Many encounters followed the one with Martha, all of them powerful. Our encounters with these first people, the shock of their story and our exchanges has gradually instilled the desire to make a film out of it.

Among the people we met during our stays at the border, we were particularly interested in three of them: Rocío, Sergio and Richard. Their personal stories illustrated in a singular way the spiral of exclusion, the erasure that affects the deported, and the wandering to which they are condemned - the very one that our film offers to explore. The trajectories of Rocío, Sergio and Richard are obviously unique, but they resonate with the profile of many of the deported.

More than an analysis, a dissection of the judicial machine or of the inner workings of the

deportation system, we want to take a subjective and sensitive snapshot of a tragedy at a precise moment of its history, on this dividing line between two countries, two worlds.

To the political tune that aims to stigmatize immigrants as "bad men", foreign criminals who have come to disturb the American peace, we oppose a human reality. Since the election of Donald Trump, the victims of the deportation policy of the United States have changed. They are now long-settled immigrants who arrived in the United States as children and started families there.

It is not our intention however to present the deportees as "good hombres" at all cost; we do not respond to moral judgment with another moralizing vision. While we do not intend to elude the criminal past of some of the deportees, we show how much of their identity, their criminality itself, is a pure product of America.

It is about highlighting the fact that the United States does not only reject to Mexico workers, "good" family mothers or fathers, but also its own delinquents, equally integrated into American society and whose criminal record stems from its ghettos or from its prison system.

At the origin of this film, there are thus intimate stories. There is the cold, administrative violence of politics lived with full force. There are shattered future, families torn apart. In our previous films and reports, we could only skim these stories, but through them already we felt the brutality of the deportation process.

Obligated by the orientation defined by the media, the irruption of a figure that makes the headlines, an umpteenth political statement that agitates the border for a moment, we felt we were missing on the basics. With *ON THE LINE*, we want to focus on these stories, give them a face and a voice. Because in the destinies broken by this border lays a tragedy of our time. We are convinced that there is the need to make a film.

Leo Mattei and Alex Gohari

ALEX GOHARI

Alex Gohari began his career as a reporter for the editorial staff of France Télévisions. For 6 years, he covered major international news events, notably the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts. In 2012, he decided to move to Iran for several months and made his first major report on Afghan migrants, "Les petites mains de Téhéran" for Arte Reportage. He has now been living in Mexico for 5 years where he continues his work on social, geopolitical, and more particularly immigration related issues. With Léo Mattei, he has directed "La Bestia" (Arte Reportage, 2018), on the train taken clandestinely by Latin American migrants and, again for Arte: "Mexico: à la recherche des migrants disparus" (Arte, February 2018) which received the Grand Prix (less than 40 minutes) at FIGRA 2019.

LÉO MATTEI

Léo Mattei has been an independent reporter for ten years, working for multiple news agencies (AP, AFP) and international channels. He has covered the major conflicts of the recent years (Libya, Syria, Mali, Central African Republic...). Léo has also directed, with Alex Gohari, "Les veines ouvertes du géant indien" (Arte, 2009) and, most recently, "Mexico: à la recherche des migrants disparus" (Arte, February 2018) which received the Grand Prix (less than 40 minutes) at FIGRA 2019. Léo particularly focuses his work on issues related to exile. Living and practicing in Mexico City for the past 5 years, he is also the author of numerous reports with Alex Gohari on emigration from Latin American countries to the United States via Mexico, this journey of all dangers that reflects many geopolitical aspects of this region of the world.

BROTHERFILMS

Brotherfilms is an independent production company. It has notably produced the political films by Thomas Legrand (Les stratèges, Paris 2014, Instincts Primaires), documentaries by David André ("La vie amoureuse des prêtres", "Chante ton bac d'abord" - Fipa d'Or 2014 -, "Du côté des vivants") as well as films by directors Camille Ménager ("Tu seras mère ma fille") and Bruno Joucla ("Devenir médecin"), Laurent Portes and Elsa Guiol ("Mariage pour tous, le grand divorce"), Delphine Minoui and Bruno Joucla ("Daraya, la bibliothèque sous les bombes" - Figa Grand Prix 2019 – Youth Jury Prize – official selection Fipadoc 2019), Jérôme Fritel ("L'Embuscade").

Recently, Brotherfilms produced "Police Attitude", by François Rabaté (Public Sénat), "Searching for Gerda Taro" directed by Camille Ménager (France 5), "Chinarctic" just launched with Arte France and directed by Olivier Truc, and with France 2, Canal + International and TV5 Monde, "Le Tribunal des Flagrants Esprits" by Hadrien La Vapeur and Corto Vaclav.

DATA & SOURCES

REPORT OF THE U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

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PRESS

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