



# "LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN"

**DIRECTION**

JAVIER GARCÍA

**PRODUCTION**

ILIANA MARTÍNEZ  
ANA PAULA URUÑUELA  
SACBÉ PRODUCCIONES

**GENRE**

DOCUMENTARY

**TIME**

80-90 MIN



## “LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN”



**T**he “Patronas” are a group of women known for throwing food and water to migrants traveling on the train as it passes through their small community named “La Patrona”, municipality of Amatlán, Veracruz. Their dedication and teamwork has led them to form a new form of organization without political ties and a sense of socialization and solidarity that is premised humanity and that today is indispensable in our society.

In the kitchen of “The Patronas” everything is routine. They clean,

wash and cook. In the kitchen they have a blackboard with the role of weekly activities; who has to go for bread, who will go to the market and who cooks. The kitchen is the space where these women dialogue. In the kitchen they talk about everything: their sons, husbands, problems of the people. Every day, they prepare about a hundred meals for migrants with donations they get themselves. The kitchen has also become a political space, they have learned to discuss about Mexico’s problems, poverty, migration, human rights, and their rights as women. ◀



## SYNOPSIS

### “LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN”

I am a journalist. In 2005 I ride the train to document the rough conditions of the journey of hundreds of Central American migrants through Mexico. Every day, all that breathed was despair, indifference. One day the train stopped in a different place. When I came to this town called “La Patrona”, I did not know that my journey would point in a different direction. In that place the tragedy was transformed into something else, into kindness, into a woman’s face, into hope.

19 years ago a group of rural women realized that people were “free riding” on the top of the train that crosses their community, “La Patrona”. They did not know who they were, why the travelling like that. Ms. Leo’s daughters, leader of the family, went to buy milk and bread. On their way back home the train was passing by and one of the young men on the train shout: “Mother, feed me, I am hungry.” She gave them all what she had

just bought. They returned home fearing their mother, telling them off. Instead Ms. Leo told them that when people are hungry, you have to give things away. Since, the women of “La Patrona” cook for Central American migrants travelling on the train.

Their kitchen has become their trench. They talk about everything there, about their children, husbands, town’s problems. Every day they cook food for about 100 migrants. They organize and get donations to do this. For instance, people from the local market provide to them with fruits and vegetables. These women are humble, but they do not consider themselves poor people. They say they are lucky because they have enough to feed themselves and to share with those who are less fortunate.

Their work has gained importance, and they have become experts on migration issues. One of their activities is to receive volunteers from all over the country to raise awareness about the needs of

migrants and try to support them. They are part of the Network of Defenders of Migrant’s Human Rights.

In 2013 they received the National Human Rights Award, one of the most important awards in this

field in Mexico. They have been invited to give conferences in Oxford University and in the Vatican Pontifical University. They delivered a letter in the Vatican City to Pope Francis denouncing all the human rights violations that migrants crossing Mexico

suffer. They describe to him how migrants are traded like merchandise by authorities that are supposed to protect them, by criminal organizations, among others.

Step by step this kitchen has become as well a political space. They have learned how to talk about the countries problems, about poverty in the countryside, about human rights, about society’s indifference towards

migrants and about their own rights as women. This transformation is what the movie is about. This documentary tells my story with them and the way these women have become one of the most honest, clear and respected voices in the field of human rights in Mexico. Now I feel I am part of them, I am a Patrona. ◀

**“ ONE DAY THE TRAIN STOPPED IN A DIFFERENT PLACE. WHEN I CAME TO THIS TOWN CALLED “LA PATRONA”, I DID NOT KNOW THAT MY JOURNEY WOULD POINT IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION. ”**





## IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

### “LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN”

The group of “Las Patronas” are recognized for their work with migrants, which they started twenty years ago. In 1995 they began to feed thousands of Central American migrants travelling on the roof of the trains to the United States. This simple action has created awareness in the society about the terrible conditions of the Central American migration and has led the women to receive national awards such as the National Human Rights Award in 2014. Recently Norma Romero, coordinator of the group, was invited to England and Italy, where she shared with students at Oxford University and the Pontifical Gregorian University. During her visit she shared their experience describing how their work has grown and they have transformed. How they went from their work on the side of the railways all the way to international spaces denouncing violations of migrant’s human rights. Their motivations and concerns impel them to continue transforming alongside migrants, to keep on growing in their processes as peasant women, mothers, and human rights advocates.

“The Patronas” are a new form of organization without political ties

and a sense of community, solidarity and often innocent. They have moved from compassion to solidarity, from charity to development. Two important changes in their understanding. Their fundamental premise is humanity. They have rejected political and government posts. They raise awareness in the community of the consequences of this tragedy caused by the modern system. Their way of organizing is a fresh and inspiring proposal for a society that is urgently demanding accountability from their political actors and new ways to rebuild its communities. “The Patronas” form an important social movement, full of energy, absolute independence and autonomy. Their goals are not related to achieve power or profit.

Mexico is a country of migrants. Because of its geographical location is one of the obliged ways into the United States for many international migrants. The women of “La Patrona” have introduced to the political agenda one of the most important rights: the right to migrate and the right to food. They also have discussed about the right to education and to work. ◀



## NARRATIVE OF THE DOCUMENTARY “LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN”

I am a photojournalist. While covering the topic of migration of Central Americans who are traversing our country, I arrived at “La Patrona”, a village situated half and hour away from Córdoba, in the state of Veracruz. However, when I got there, I couldn't help but stay and have a closer look, to reconsider the furtive glance cast at it by the news, to stay and understand what was brewing there. The narrative of the movie is circular: starting at the “Cocina de Las Patronas”, the village kitchen, it goes to the train tracks, where everyday “Las Patronas” feed a number of Central American migrants who travel “de mosca”, i.e. on top of the moving freight trains that passes through their village, and back to the kitchen.

In the kitchen of “Las Patronas”, everything is routine. They wash, they clean, they cook. In the kitchen, there is a large blackboard stating the different chores to be done taken care of a given week: who is in charge of the bread, who is going to the market, whose turn it is to cook; they do all of this while chatting about everything

and nothing. This kitchen is a space for dialogue among these women: One moment, they speak about their sons who want to make their way northwards, about their unemployed husbands and their infidelities, the next moment, they are talking about God, about how we are all equal in His eyes, about a church that isn't always helping those who need it most, about those self-proclaimed Catholics who are seemingly incapable of helping the migrants. However, little by little, over the duration of the film, this kitchen is transforming into a political space as well: they also talk about the situation of the country, where there is no more work in rural areas, and men find themselves - exactly like the Central Americans - forced to migrate, and they talk about the government's indifference to this situation.

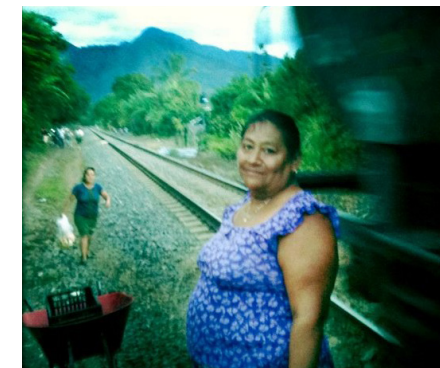
At the beginning of the film, the rail tracks represent an exclusively religious duty to “feed thy neighbor”. They hurry, they leave the kitchen, they throw the bags to the migrants travelling on top of the train. And the train leaves again. One day, they are too early, and they wait, the rhythm

slows down, they feel the rails, they chat, they wonder if the train stopped, they try to organize themselves better, spreading out along the rails. They wait. They phone to ask whether the train stopped in another place this time. The train stopped just outside the village. Everything speeds up. They get there on the trucks of some volunteers, packing more food as they go. The hunger is palpable. There are hundreds of migrants, literally flooding the tracks, ripping the bags of food out of the volunteers' hands.

Another day, the train arrives slowly, people are descending from the train top.

Everything is chaos. On the rails the camera is particularly erratic. People come towards the camera. The women shout at them not to get down of the train, that there is food for all of them. They leave. They all scream. Silence. Then - an accident.

This way, throughout the movie and by sharing with them, “Las Patronas” discover the tragedy through which migrants live everyday. One day, the train stopped and they were able to talk with the migrants a little longer,



they ask where they are coming from, whether they are tired, if something happened to them during the journey, where they are headed towards. The migrants told them about the situation of their countries, that there is no work, that there are no opportunities to develop and that the journey is filled with violence. They describe the assaults, the extortion from police

officers and reveal that being in “La Patrona” has been a peaceful haven in their journey. Then, another day, the Caravan of Central-American mothers of the disappeared migrants arrives to “La Patrona” (La Caravana de Madres Centroamericanas Buscando a sus Hijos Desaparecidos) with pictures

in their hands. They talked about their suffering, about their search. “Las Patronas” host them and feed them. They learn about Human Rights and start to feel empowered, as if becoming a powerful political figure. Volunteers begin to arrive, from

universities of Jesuit seminars, hoping to support the work of “Las Patronas”, who explain to them their work and give talks about the state of Central American migration in Mexico.

The kitchen is the political space where they have organized an assembly to write down the speech addressed at Peña Nieto, which they will pronounce during the National Award for Human

Rights. They go to Mexico City and Norma prepares to read her speech. During the event, as President Enrique Peña Nieto is about to give her the award, she stops him, gets down the stage, then Norma and “Las Patronas” put on their aprons. She gets on stage again with her apron on and accepts

**“ HOWEVER,  
LITTLE BY  
LITTLE, OVER  
THE DURATION  
OF THE FILM,  
THIS KITCHEN IS  
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SPACE.”**

the award. In the speech directed at President Peña Nieto, Norma tells him that migration is not only a Central American phenomenon, rather, it is a Mexican and a global one, she tells him that there was time when they were able to live off the land but now they are living in a

broken country, pierced by violence, by impunity, by apathy, by discrimination and by the lack of real opportunities. For “Las Patronas”, defending migrants' rights also means defending everyone's rights, regardless of nationality. Ultimately, now that they are aware of migration and Human Rights, “Las Patronas” also wonder about their own life, their rights as rural women. ◀



## AUDIOVISUAL PROPOSAL

### “LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN”

The audiovisual proposal is different for each of the three devices:

**JOURNALISTIC SEQUENCE:** To differentiate the director's perception from the journalistic perception's, the first sequence aims to emulate the director's experience as a photojournalist. This, covering the topic of migration, migrants crossing the Southern frontier and their stay in our country on top of commercial trains. The approach of this sequence is journalistic, informative, critical, pessimistic. Desolated human faces, tired from the journey, images of the tragedy, migrant women and men transformed into homeless people, mutilated bodies. Hopelessness, human misery, indifference. The sound of the train joins the voiceover of the director that narrates that rupture between that image and the encounter with “Las Patronas” where instead of indifference he found hope.

**THE KITCHEN AND THE DAILY LIFE:** Following the journalistic sequence, the movie starts again. In another place. In a village called “La Patrona”, ruled by another rhythm, a

slower rhythm, the rhythm of rural lives. There is no music, only diegetic sounds prevail, sounds from the village of “La Patrona”, from the kitchen. Sounds of the daily life, roosters crow, the sound of people's steps crossing the village, water flowing, dishes being washed. Women cooking and chatting. The camera is the director's view as an erratic accomplice and as an outsider in this daily life, trying to understand it. He observes women, details, looks around trying to listen and understand.

**THE RAILS AND MIGRATION:** On the rails conversations stop, the rhythm changes. The camera wobbles, runs next to the women, it is specially erratic, just like the doings around the passing of the train. Everything is too rapid. The sounds of the train passing, industrial sounds, screams. The camera's point of view is the same from the one of “Las Patronas”; they look at the train from beneath, they talk to the migrants that climb down, they accompany them to hospital, but, oppositely from the first sequence, they never climb up to the train. ◀





BIO

## "LAS PATRONAS KITCHEN"



### JAVIER GARCÍA DIRECTOR

He was born in Mexico City in 1968. He studied Music and Social Anthropology. He became part of a group of photographers in the Mexican agency Imagenlatina and in other journals. In 2004, he was finalist in the IV edition of the UNICEF award for children's rights, Panamá. In 2005, he was selected for the photojournalistic festival in Gijón. In 2006 he achieved with distinctions a course in documentary photography "los trabajos y los Días" in Colombia. In 2009, he was the producer and photographer in the shortfilm "La Patrona" that got presented in: the VII Cinema Festival on Human Rights Donostia, San Sebastian, Spain 2009, the II Film and Human Rights Festival of Palma de Mallorca, Spain 2009, II Documentary Film Zanate Colima Festival, Mexico 2009, 32nd Festival International du Courtmetrage in Clermont Ferrand, France 2010, CinéRail Festival Paris, France 2010, Prix Special du Jury, Regard sur le Court Métrage Québec, Canada 2010, Sustainable Development Award, Latin-American re-encounter in Toulouse, France 2010, 50 Film Festival International Kracow, Poland 2010, Festival International des Très Courts Prix Pndation Agir contre L'Exclusion Prix de la Gazette de Montpellier, France 2010, Expression in Short Film International Festival, Award for the best Mexican Short film , Guanajuato, Mexico July 2010, Short Shorts Film Festival Mexico September 2010 and in the Festival de Cannes in 2010. He produced and designed the sound for the Geography documentary of Dolor (pain) in 2014. He perceives photography as a daily routine in a society constantly changing. He considers photography social commitment, more important that ever. ◀

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### ANA PAULA URUÑUELA PRODUCTION

She has a degree in Contemporary Dancing. She mostly works in the field of scenic arts and production in general. She created the play "La Bestia Historias que migran, historias con rostros", that won the award for "best choreography" and "Best sound edition" in the Culiacan Award for Choreography Hector Chavez 2012. She benefited from Proyecta of the Ministry of Culture in Jalisco, Mexico 2014. She won the Jalisco Youth Award for Culture in 2013, she benefited from the program for incentives of Projects and Cultural Investment from the National Budget for Cultural and Arts. She is fellow of the program of international mobility for youth in the organization Quebec-Américas and the Jalisciense Institute for Youth. She worked as a volunteer in the shelter of Belen, "Posada del migrante" in the city of Saltillo Coahuila and in FM4 Paso Libre. ◀



### ILIANA MARTÍNEZ EJECUTIVE PRODUCTION

She studied a degree in International Relations at ITESM Monterrey, Mexico. In her first documentary, DeNADIE in 2005, she collaborated as a searcher. DeNADIE got selected in more than 40 national and international film festivals and recognized with 19 awards, such as the audience award of the Sundance Film Festival and best documentary film of the year in the Mexican Film Academy. As a result of the great success of her first documentary, she participated in a diffusion campaign with social organizations and a number of universities in Mexico in relation to the issue of Central American migration. She also worked as a volunteer in FM4 Paso Libre developing projects related to migration and art. In the past year she has been working with the team of her first documentary, DeNADIE as a searcher, producer and co-director in the elaboration of a new documentary about water. This new project is in the stage of post-production and has been financed by Sundance Documentary and by the Rockefeller Foundation. She studied in Poland and Netherlands a master's program in cultural studies financed but the European Union. ◀



**BIOGRAFÍAS**  
**"LAS PATRONAS**  
**KITCHEN"**



**AFRA CITLALLI MEJÍA LARA**  
SCRIPT

Since she creates her first documentary, in 2000, awarded with diverse national and international acknowledgements, she realizes that documentary has become her own way of telling stories and has been working in this sector since. She worked as a researcher, in the development ground and writing documentary scripts of her own projects and other director's. She worked in different audiovisual productions in Mexico and elsewhere. She was worked for a diverse range of institutions such as the Studisplaytime in Spain, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. In 2011 she directs her first featurefilm "Las preguntas del caracol". She studied a master in Documentary Film Creation at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona and a master in Science and Culture Communication in the University of ITESO, is a founding member at the REDVLAT, (Red de Estudios Visuales Latinoamericanos). She also works as a teacher in audiovisual arts in the Technological Institute of Superior Studies in Occident and in University of Guadalajara. ◀



**CARLOS CÁRDENAS**  
EDITION

He is a producer and audiovisual editor specialized in documentary. He has a degree in Social Communication from the University of Colima (2002-06). He also studied documentary production in the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima, 2005). He is co-fundator and director of the annual Film and Documentary Video Festival Zanate in Colima (since 2008). He is the editor in the documentary feature film "Las preguntas del caracol" y "La hora de la siesta". ◀