

Entre Nos (Between US) and *Red Father*: Aspects of US life and history

By Joanne Laurier
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Entre Nos, written and directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria LaMorte; *Red Father*, directed by Tova Beck-Friedman

Entre Nos, a 2009 film, was screened June 20 at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, New York, as part of the museum's "Changing the Picture" series. *Red Father* was presented at the SOHO International Film Festival in May.

Entre Nos

The Obama administration has deported two million immigrants and continues carrying out deportations at a faster rate than any president in US history. On any given day, there are some 30,000 immigrants locked up in the largest immigration detention system in the world.

Those who manage to escape the legal dragnet and eke out an existence without documents face harsh conditions, often at the mercy of unscrupulous employers. The 2009 social drama *Entre Nos (Between US)*, which chronicles the hardships endured by a Colombian immigrant and her two children, puts some flesh and blood on these conditions.

Co-written and co-directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria LaMorte, *Entre Nos* is based on Mendoza's early experiences when she, her mother and brother, shortly after arriving from Colombia, became homeless and were forced to scavenge for food and shelter in New York City.

In the film, Mendoza plays her mother Mariana who follows her husband Antonio (Andres Munar) from their native country to Queens, New York. Soon afterward, Antonio abandons her and their two children, Gabriel (Sebastian Villada), 10, and Andrea (Laura Montana), 6.

The undocumented Mariana desperately tries to stay afloat by selling homemade empanadas and collecting recyclables. But the descent into homelessness feels almost inevitable. Adding to her burden ... she is pregnant. A park bench one night, sheets of cardboard another and, whenever enough money is on hand, the occasional fleabag motel, shelter the three. Eventually, Mariana finds a modest apartment in a South Asian neighborhood and a few more odd jobs for

herself and the children. Fortunately, the trio are treated with kindness by Preet (Sarita Choudhury), the woman who manages the building.

The family's precarious situation, however, demands that Mariana abort her child—a painful decision, emotionally (for a devout Catholic) and physically.

There is a great deal of heart in *Entre Nos*. A charming and sincere bond among its three leads propels the film. The presentation of their talent, ingenuity, courage and dignity is a constant and leaves its mark.

Director Mendoza writes: "Throughout my childhood my mother worked countless double-shifts at the toilet bowl cleaners business and flipping burgers at local fast food restaurants near me. We never talked about the roaches in [the] house or the yearning to see our family back in [the] country and culture of Colombia.

"Instead we had to learn to smile through the grit, the trial of tears, and dealing with heartache. As the years passed, I came to a sublime new realization that our story was not unique. Thousands of immigrant mothers, for hundreds of years, have endured problems when trying adapt to their new immigration in the USA. My mother like those before her have overcome all that remains for exactly the same reason, to build the foundation for a better life for their children."

The movie's postscript indicates that the real Mariana, Gabriel and Andrea have succeeded in building better lives for themselves. Perhaps this helps explain why the film at times pulls its punches. That is, despite the depiction of arduous conditions, a certain passivity is woven into the drama. The reality is that, unlike Mariana and her children, the vast majority of immigrants in America never escape poverty.

Furthermore, *Entre Nos* tends to center too much on individual biographical details and character traits at the expense of a wider look at the source of the problems. Directors Mendoza and LaMorte focus on the individual qualities of their protagonists, including the weaknesses of figures such as Antonio, Mariana's husband—who is also a

victim of the social circumstances. The finger tends to be pointed in the wrong direction.

Overall, however, *Entre Nos* pays attention to the lives of the poor and disenfranchised, and in the process, touches upon the human cost of the government's cruel vendetta against immigrants.

The film is available from IndiePix Films.

Red Father

Tova Beck-Friedman's documentary, *Red Father*, follows the life of Bernard Ades (1903-1986), an American Communist Party lawyer who won renown by defending African-Americans in capital cases in Maryland in the 1930s. The majority of the film's commentary and analysis is provided by his daughter, Janet Ades.

Bernard Ades, radicalized by the Great Depression, joined the Communist Party in 1931 and began working for its legal arm, the International Labor Defense. The most intriguing segment of *Red Father* concerns the Uell Lee case—Ades' best known trial. Lee or "Orphan Jones," as he was known, was a 60-year-old black farmhand in Ocean City, Maryland, accused of fatally shooting a white family.

Ades' efforts led to a court of appeals ruling that in order for an African-American to receive a fair trial, there had to be African-Americans placed on panels that made them eligible to be chosen as jurors. The case represented a historic reversal in Maryland. It took place at a time when the Communist Party was involved in other legal battles, such as the notorious Scottsboro Boys case in Alabama. (The film thus helps refute the slander that the CP at the time was simply trying to make cheap political capital out of the Scottsboro and other lynch-mob justice cases.)

Lee was eventually convicted and executed. Ades was thereupon victimized by the authorities, and defended by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP. *Red Father* is silent, however, about the fact that the NAACP, a rabidly anticommunist outfit, undoubtedly only defended Ades because of his popularity in the black community. (Janet Ades says that her father often took on cases in which the defendants were black and in danger of execution.)

Ades fought in the American Stalinists' Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War in 1937. While there is valuable archival material on Spain in *Red Father*, the role of Stalinism is either obscured or whitewashed. Its Popular Front in Spain—and elsewhere—was a consciously counterrevolutionary policy, aimed at assuaging the governments of the Western "democracies" and defending the existing social system. In forming alliances with bourgeois parties and physically annihilating their opposition on the left, the Soviet and Spanish Stalinists, whatever the individual heroics or intentions of people like

Ades, were largely responsible for the defeat of the Spanish revolution and the coming to power of the fascist Franco.

The film touches upon critical historical episodes, such as the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939, the Holocaust, the FBI's decades-long surveillance of Ades and the HUAC witch-hunts. In regard to the latter, however, the entire emphasis in Janet Ades' commentary is on the irredeemably reactionary character of American life. Despite her animosity toward the CP, she does not acknowledge that it bears any responsibility, through its own cynical opportunism and pro-Roosevelt politics, for the atmosphere and the attacks that were to come.

Beck-Friedman's film is at times critical of Ades' attitude towards the various epochal events, but generally exhibits a lack of historical insight. Notably, the Moscow Trials, the Korean War, Stalin's death and the Khrushchev revelations in 1956 regarding Stalin's crimes—all of which had a profound impact on the evolution of the American CP—are ignored by the filmmakers.

Janet Ades admires her father, but is bitter about his unswerving loyalty to Stalin and the party, which had negative repercussions for his career and, therefore, the fortunes of his family. At one time a member of the CP's youth organization, she did run afoul of the Stalinists ("I was afraid of them") when her boyfriend asked questions about the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the suppression of the working class opposition to Stalinism. Not much is made of this.

As a whole, the documentary suffers from a failure to grasp the objective character of Stalinism and the fate of the Russian Revolution. While interesting material is included, *Red Father* is excessively devoted to the musings of a disappointed daughter.

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