

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Granito: How to Nail a Dictator

A Film by Pamela Yates,
Peter Kinoy and Paco de Onís



www.pbs.org/pov

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, APRIL 2012

For me "**Granito**" is a second chance to help right a terrible wrong.

I first went to Guatemala in 1982 to make a film about a hidden war, a film that would become my first feature-length documentary, *When the Mountains Tremble*. We now know that hidden in that war was a genocide the Guatemalan military dictators committed against the Mayan people. The anger I feel toward those generals is almost unbearable. But now, more than 25 years later, *When the Mountains Tremble* and all its outtakes are being used as forensic evidence in a case against former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who appeared in my original film.

Digging through the outtakes and preparing evidence for the court case made me realize that a story I had thought was over was very much alive and needed to be told. This sequel to *When the Mountains Tremble* would be called **Granito**, Spanish for tiny grain of sand. It is a concept I first learned in the Guatemalan highlands and carried it with me throughout my filmmaking life. It reflects the communal values that guide Mayan communities and means that each of us can make a small contribution to positive social change, and together we can make great changes in favor of equality and human rights.

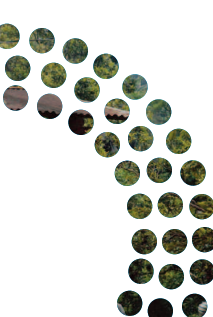
As fate would have it, the central character in *When the Mountains Tremble* was a 22-year-old Mayan human rights defender named Rigoberta Menchú who'd fled into exile and whose family members had been killed. Ten years later, she became the first indigenous woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Leveraging her stature as a Nobel laureate, Rigoberta Menchú originated the case against the generals that breathed new life into the quest for justice, and inspired the new film **Granito**.

As filming began on "**Granito**", I was surprised to discover that Guatemalans had never given up on finding justice and uncovering the collective memory of their buried past. I wanted to find a way to highlight the courage of these empowered individuals. This sentiment is at the heart of "**Granito**", which is how it became such a hopeful and transformative film. But for me, this new film held a deeper filmmaking challenge. After three decades of involvement with Guatemala, I had become a character in the story I needed to tell. This demanded that I examine my feelings and beliefs back when I started. I had to find a way to use the narrative power of documentary filmmaking to combine the beauty with the anger: the beauty of youthful idealism --- mine as well as the Guatemalan revolutionary movement's, and the anger I now feel towards the war criminals who had continued to flaunt their impunity.



Director Pamela Yates

Photo courtesy of Skylight Pictures



In January of this year, General Ríos Montt lost his immunity from prosecution and was called to account in a court in Guatemala City. The prosecution projected an interview I filmed with him in 1982—part of the re-discovered filmic outtakes seen in **Granito**—during the hearing to help convince the judge that there was sufficient evidence to go to trial. It was a satisfying moment when the judge ordered that Ríos Montt be indicted for genocide and held under house arrest, and that he be put on trial this year. And now, more perpetrators of war crimes have been indicted and convicted. A tipping point for justice is being reached in Guatemala.

I realize that the collective concept of “**Granito**” has permeated my filmmaking life, a journey I have traveled with Peter Kinoy, my fellow filmmaker and co-founder of Skylight Pictures. Peter was the producer and editor of *When the Mountains Tremble* and is the editor of *Granito*. Together we’ve developed our approach to political documentary storytelling, embracing the same techniques of cinematography, scoring and editing used by narrative filmmakers to evoke drama and urgency.

Although **Granito** is rooted in the past—how I got started, the choices I made along the way and how what I thought I was doing back then has a different meaning today—it is really a film about the future. **Granito** is meant to inspire the next generation of young, engaged filmmakers to see and embrace the power of documentary filmmaking to make a difference.

Pamela Yates

Director **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**



Pamela Yates filming on “*When the Mountains Tremble*”
in the Guatemalan highlands, 1982.

Photo courtesy of Newton Thomas Sigel / Skylight Pictures



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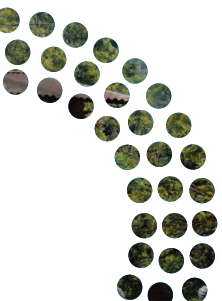
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Sometimes a film that sets out to document history actually ends up making history. So it is with **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**. Filmmaker Pamela Yates presents a haunting tale, part political thriller, part memoir, of the extermination of nearly 200,000 Guatemalan people, told through the lens of lawyers and activists who have never given up on the quest for justice and strive to hold the murderers accountable.

Yates' involvement in this quest is unique. As the survivors and activists build an international human rights case against Guatemalan general Efraín Ríos Montt, outtakes from Yates' 1983 film, *When the Mountains Tremble*, emerge as critical forensic evidence—a witness to genocide. **Granito** continues to serve as witness, but this time to the efforts of those who pursue justice.

Military occupation of the Guatemalan highlands, 1982. The 1998 Truth Commission concluded that the Guatemalan Army committed genocide against the Mayan population.

Photo courtesy of Jean-Marie Simon

As an outreach tool, **Granito** is compelling and rich. The events it documents oblige viewers to confront the legacy of colonialism that damaged indigenous peoples' rights and the role of the United States in supporting Latin American military dictators. The film also offers insights into the complexities of international law and the difficulties of prosecuting human rights violations, including genocide. But despite its difficult subject matter, the film's tone is optimistic. It introduces viewers to people who risk their lives in pursuit of justice because they believe that things can change. As they embrace their own power to make a difference, they serve as powerful role models.



Granito: How to Nail a Dictator is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to Latin American history and genocide, including *Nostalgia for the Light*, *Discovering Dominga*, *The Fall of Fujimori* and *Enemies of the People*, or films on human rights and international law, including *The Reckoning: The Battle for the International Criminal Court* (Pamela Yates' previous POV film) and *The Judge and the General*.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups, including groups of lawyers and human rights activists
- Academic departments or student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

Granito: How to Nail a Dictator is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- Archival studies
- Central America
- “Disappeared” persons
- Film/documentary studies
- Forensic anthropology
- Genocide
- Guatemala
- Human rights
- Indigenous peoples
- International law/international courts
- Latin America
- Mayan people
- Military dictatorships
- Rigoberta Menchú
- Social justice
- Spanish National Court and “universal jurisdiction”
- Transitional justice
- Truth and reconciliation initiatives
- U.S. foreign policy
- Peace studies

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Granito** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively. It is also meant to help each person think about what his or her *granito*—a tiny grain of sand, a small contribution to positive social change—might be.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pbs.org/pov/outreach

Guatemala's Recent History

In January 2012, after 30 years of impunity, former Guatemalan general and dictator Efraín Ríos Montt was indicted by a Guatemalan court for crimes against humanity. Against all odds, he was charged with committing genocide in the 1980s against the country's poor Mayan people.

Back in 1982, a young first-time filmmaker, Pamela Yates, had used her seeming naïveté to gain unprecedented access to Ríos Montt, his generals and leftist guerrillas waging a clandestine war deep in the mountains. The resulting film, *When the Mountains Tremble* (released in 1983), revealed that the Guatemalan army was killing Mayan civilians. As Yates notes in her extraordinary follow-up, **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**, Guatemala “wrapped its arms around my soul and never let me go.” *When the Mountains Tremble* became central to her life again 30 years later, when a Spanish lawyer investigating the Ríos Montt regime asked Yates for her help. The lawyer believed Yates' first film and its outtakes just might contain evidence that would allow charges of genocide to be brought under international law.

Granito spans 30 years and portrays seven protagonists in Guatemala, Spain and the United States as they attempt to bring justice to violence-plagued Guatemala. Among the twists of fate -

- A 22-year-old Mayan woman, Rigoberta Menchú, the storyteller in *When the Mountains Tremble*, goes on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 and then initiates the court case against Ríos Montt that eventually leads to the use of Yates' footage as evidence.
- A guerrilla commander, Gustavo Meoño, who authorized Yates' filming with the insurgents in 1982, becomes a key player in uncovering the mechanisms of disappearances and state terror.



Portrait of Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum, the original storyteller in “When the Mountains Tremble”. Rigoberta Menchu has run twice for President of Guatemala.

- Naomi Roht-Arriaza, the young press liaison in Guatemala who helped arrange Yates' filming with the guerrillas in 1982, becomes one of the key international lawyers working on the genocide case.

- Fredy Peccerelli, the head of the Guatemalan forensic anthropology team assigned to unearth evidence of the vast killings, repeatedly viewed *When the Mountains Tremble* while growing up.

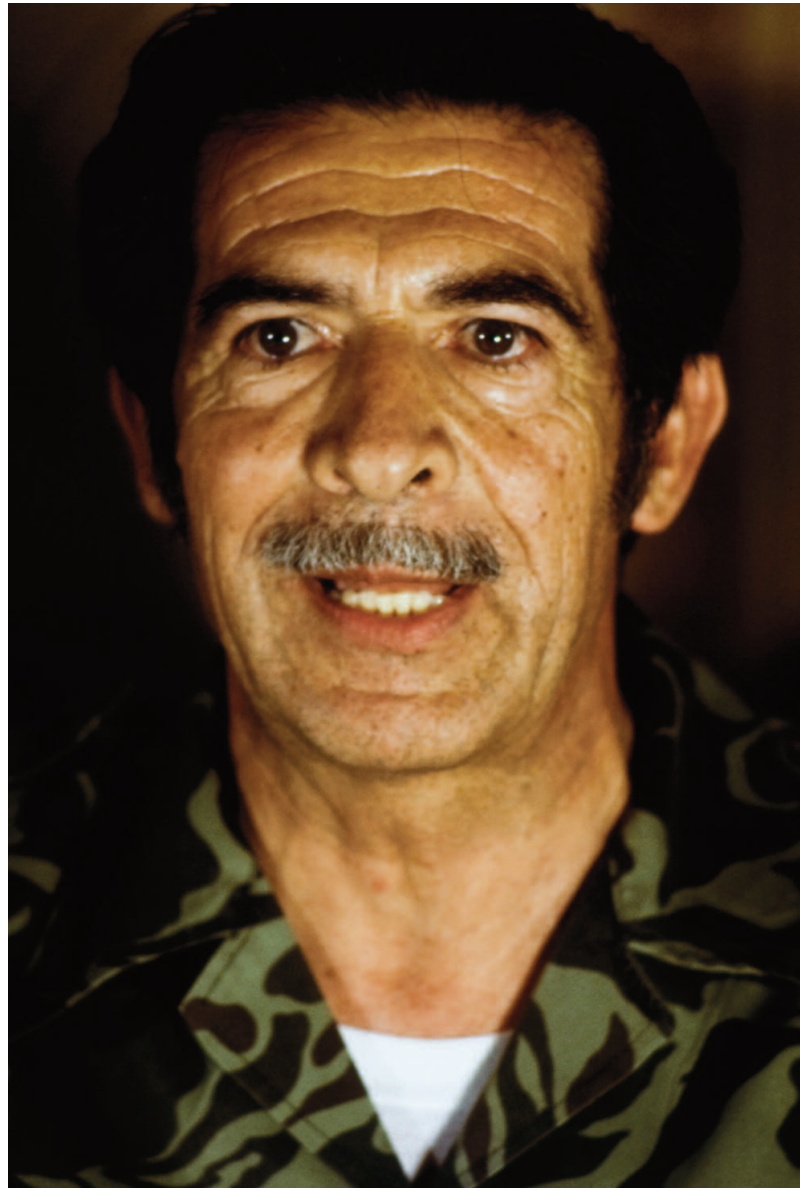
Granito is a film about a film and that film's remarkable afterlife for a filmmaker, a nation and, most dramatically, as evidence in a long struggle to give a dictator's victims their day in court. It is an inside, as-it-happens account of the way a new generation of human rights activists operates in a globalized, media-saturated world. **Granito** shows how multiple efforts—the work of the Guatemalan and international lawyers, the testimony of survivors, a documentary film, the willingness of a Spanish judge to assert universal jurisdiction—each become a *granito*, a tiny grain of sand, adding up to tip the scales of justice.

Even after Ríos Montt was deposed and a tenuous democracy restored in Guatemala in 1986, he and the generals continued to enjoy wealth, status and freedom to participate in politics. In 1999, a United Nations-sponsored truth commission concluded that genocide had been committed by the government, and that same year Bill Clinton, then president of the United States, declared that U.S. support for military forces and intelligence units that engaged in violence and widespread repression was wrong. Even the Guatemalan generals, who claimed that overzealous field commanders were to blame, admitted that crimes had occurred.

Dedicated Guatemalan activists, victims and lawyers took great risks, working for years to bring cases of human rights violations committed during the civil war to justice in the national courts. But the justice system was weak and the cases languished, with little action beyond cursory investigations by prosecutors.

A new dimension emerged: the growing movement to assert universal jurisdiction in cases of human rights abuses, the commitment of activists—and the persistence of memory in film. In Yates' *When the Mountains Tremble* and its outtakes from 1982, Ríos Montt repeatedly guarantees that atrocities could not be taking place because he is in total command. Yet Yates' recorded footage of a military-conducted tour, which the army hoped would depict its successful war against guerrillas, appears instead to show the result of a mass murder of unarmed civilians.

Fast-forward to recent years, when lawyers and plaintiffs were seeking an international indictment in Spain, whose National Court has led the way in such cases. An international indictment comes into play only after local



General José Efraín Ríos Montt at the height of his power 1982. He has been indicted on charges of genocide, placed under house arrest in 2012, his trial due to begin.

Photo courtesy of Jean-Marie Simon

courts fail to act, and no one expected much from the Guatemalan judicial system. And then this past January—one year after **Granito**'s premiere at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival—Ríos Montt was indicted in Guatemala for genocide, in what can only be described as a stunning precedent for that country.



The Guatemala Genocide Case in Spain

In 1999, Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú filed a lawsuit in Spanish Supreme Court against eight Guatemalan military leaders (including Efraín Ríos Montt) and two police officials linked to killings in Guatemala during that country's civil war.

The Spanish national court is a leader in applying the international legal concept of universal jurisdiction, with roots in the U.N. Genocide Convention, which holds that some crimes, such as terrorism and genocide, are so egregious that if they are not tried in the country where they occurred, they may be tried anywhere. A famous example of universal jurisdiction was Israel's decision to try Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, and the arrest warrant that the Spanish National Court issued for Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1998.

In June 2006, Spanish Judge Santiago Pedraz went to Guatemala to begin an investigation into the

Head of the Guatemalan Armed Forces in 1982 General Benedicto Lucas García shown here leading a group of helicopters as part of the Army's scorched earth campaign in the indigenous highlands of Guatemala.

Photo courtesy of Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos

genocide case, but he was repeatedly obstructed, making it impossible for him to gather testimony. He returned to Madrid and issued international arrest warrants for the eight military leaders and police officials named in Menchú's lawsuit.

While the Guatemalan courts initially accepted the warrants of three of the eight officials, even that acceptance was rescinded in December 2007, with the claim that Spain did not have jurisdiction to prosecute Guatemalans.

Judge Pedraz proceeded with the case, however, and the first hearings took place in Madrid on February 4, 2008. Witnesses included survivors, journalists, experts, forensic anthropologists and eyewitnesses of the killings.



Spain has a strong national interest in seeing the perpetrators of the Guatemalan genocide brought to justice. The 1980 assault on the Spanish embassy in Guatemala by the Guatemalan police left 39 people dead; during the course of the civil war in Guatemala, several Spanish priests and religious workers serving in Guatemala were assassinated.

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Photos of people captured and forcibly disappeared by the Guatemalan military in the 1980s. This Military logbook was leaked to Kate Doyle and is now at the center of a case at the Interamerican Court of Human Rights against the Guatemalan government.

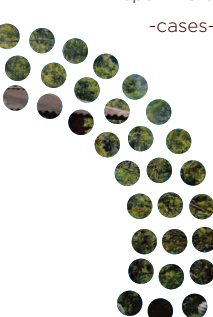
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The Guatemala Genocide Case in Guatemala

Also in 1999, massacre survivors and their Guatemalan legal advisors first brought a criminal complaint against Ríos Montt for genocide in the Guatemalan courts. While the national justice system remained paralyzed in a case that touched the highest echelons of power, people gathered evidence and built the legal case nationally and continued to bring witnesses and evidence, including a number of highly incriminating documents, before the Spanish court. After a long-time human rights activist became Guatemala's attorney general and Ríos Montt lost immunity due to his term in Congress coming to an end, the Guatemalan court finally took action. In January 2012, Ríos Montt was ordered to stand trial in a Guatemalan court on charges of genocide and placed under house arrest with bail set at \$65,000.

Filmmaker Pamela Yates filed this report from Guatemala via cell phone on January 26, 2012:

A Dictator in the Dock

A culmination of decades of work by the victims and survivors of the Guatemalan genocide forced former general Efraín Ríos Montt to appear in court Thursday for a hearing to decide whether there was enough evidence to take him to trial on charges of genocide.

The prosecution spent hours presenting overwhelming evidence in the form of military documents, exhumation reports and photos linking Ríos Montt directly to hundreds of deaths and disappearances. Surviving family members, Ixil Mayan in traditional dress, crowded the standing-room-only courtroom in stunned silence. Some wept.

Outside the Justice Palace, in an open area now named Human Rights Plaza, hundreds more watched the proceedings on a huge screen.

The defense's case asserted that Ríos Montt did not command his army officers' counterinsurgency campaign and should not be held responsible.

But after hours deliberating, the judge ruled to prosecute Ríos Montt on charges of genocide, and to place him under house arrest with a \$65,000 bail set.

The crowd broke out in cheers and sent firecrackers into the air in loud celebration.

This is a huge victory for the victims and survivors of the Guatemalan genocide, human rights defenders and the lawyers' efforts worldwide.



Clothes recovered from skeletons in an exhumed mass grave in Guatemala City by Fredy Peccerelli's forensic anthropology team. The clothes can help identify the disappeared.

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg

Evidence being used in the case includes hundreds of declassified U.S. and Guatemalan documents that detail the activities of Guatemalan security forces. One of the key pieces of evidence is the 359-page collection of Plan Sofía records, which document the military's use of scorched earth operations in Guatemala's Ixil region and will be used by the prosecution to prove the criminal responsibility of senior government and military officials, including Ríos Montt. The document was smuggled out of a secret military archive and given to Kate Doyle (featured in the film) of the National Security Archive in 2009. After months of analysis and authentication, Doyle turned "Plan Sofía" over to the Guatemalan prosecutors as well as the lawyers in the Spanish case.



Young Ixil Mayan girls in Nebaj, Guatemala 1982
This was one of the hardest hit areas by the Guatemalan military, and many villages no longer exist.

Photo courtesy of Jean-Marie Simon

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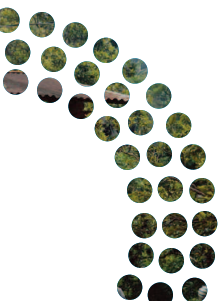
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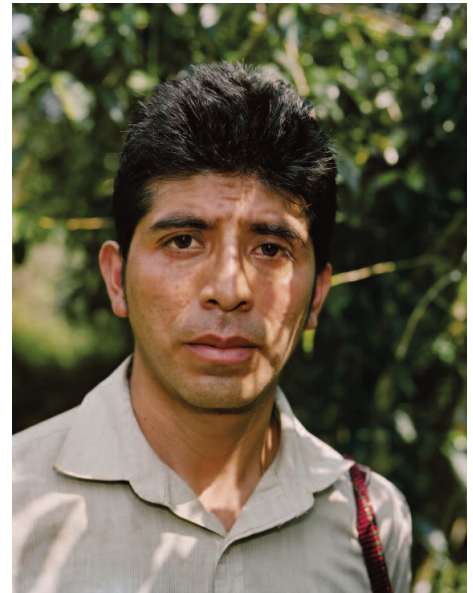


Selected People Featured in **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**

Pamela Yates, who serves as both filmmaker and narrator in **Granito**, is a human rights filmmaker and co-founder of Skylight Pictures, a company dedicated to creating films and advanced digital media that advance awareness of human rights and the quest for justice by implementing multi-year outreach campaigns designed to engage, educate and activate social change. As part of that work, Yates is currently developing a companion transmedia project, *Granito: Every Memory Matters* (see this guide's **Taking Action** section).



Almudena Bernabeu leads the Center for Justice and Accountability's Latin America program, and is currently the vice president of the Spanish Human Rights Association in Madrid. She became the lead lawyer in the Guatemalan genocide case in 2006 before the Spanish National Court. As international attorney for the Center for Justice and Accountability, she is also leading the legal team prosecuting senior Salvadoran military officials for the infamous massacre of Jesuit priests in 1989.



Antonio Caba is a survivor of the 1982 Ilocom massacre. He was 11 years old when his village was attacked. Caba now works to bring justice to his community, and to protect future generations from the atrocities he has suffered. He served on the steering committee of the Association for Justice and Reconciliation, a Guatemalan human rights organization that brought the legal complaint against Ríos Montt for genocide in the Guatemalan courts in 1999. In 2008, Caba traveled to Madrid to testify on behalf of his community at the Spanish National Court in the Guatemalan genocide case. He is now on the board of directors of the Center for Human Rights Legal Action in Guatemala City. Caba lives in Ilocom with his family.

Selected People Featured in **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**

Kate Doyle is a senior analyst of U.S. policy in Latin America at the National Security Archive, a nonprofit organization dedicated to declassifying secret U.S. government documents. As director of the organization's Guatemala Project, Doyle was leaked an original copy of Plan Sofia, an explosive document that details the Guatemalan army's scorched earth campaign against the Mayan at the height of the conflict. Since 1992, she has worked with Latin American human rights groups, truth commissions and prosecutors and has testified as an expert witness in numerous criminal cases, including the 2008 trial of Peru's former President Alberto Fujimori.



Alejandra García's father, Fernando, was disappeared by the military dictatorship in 1984 when she was barely two years old. In response, her mother, Nineth Montenegro, sought out others whose family members had been disappeared and created the Mutual Support Group to search for the disappeared. It became one of the country's most important human rights organizations. As García came of age, she decided to become a lawyer to discover what had happened to her father and bring justice to him. When secret national police archives were discovered in Guatemala City, documents were uncovered that named the perpetrators of her father's disappearance. Armed with this evidence, García went to trial in October 2010: Two former police officers were convicted and their commanders are now charged as well.



Rigoberta Menchú is a lifelong human rights leader and the first indigenous woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (which she received in 1992). She appeared as the storyteller in Pamela Yates' film *When the Mountains Tremble*. Menchú's mother, father and brother were all killed by the army during the era of dictatorial regimes, and in 1981 she was forced to flee the country. In exile she began her international campaign to stop the violence in Guatemala. After the peace accords were signed, Menchú returned home and started the political movement WINAQ that is now working to achieve a more inclusive and democratic Guatemala.

Selected People Featured in **Granito: How to Nail a Dictator**

Gustavo Meoño was a founding leader of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor—a rebel group that took up arms against the military dictatorship in Guatemala in the early 1970s; he granted Pamela Yates permission to film with the rebels in the highlands in 1982 when she was making *When the Mountains Tremble*. Meoño survived the conflict in Guatemala but was forced to go into hiding for many years. Later he joined with Rigoberta Menchú, as the director of her foundation. In a remarkable twist of fate he is now the director of the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional, or Historic Archives of the National Police, a project preserving and cataloguing the many thousands of police records that were discovered by accident in 2005. In a landmark case, his team's work at the archives led, in 2010, to two former police officers being sentenced to 40 years in prison for the forced disappearance of Alejandra García's father, Fernando García.



Fredy Peccerelli is the executive director of the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala, or Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation, (which he first joined in 1995) and leads the team that is excavating the mass graves of Guatemala's generation of disappeared at La Verbena cemetery. Peccerelli's own family was forced to flee Guatemala for the Bronx when Peccerelli was 12, after his father received death threats. He has also led investigations in the former Yugoslavia and testified as an expert witness on genocide before international tribunals.



Naomi Roht-Arriaza worked as a freelance journalist in Guatemala during the 1980s, trying to bring the story of the continued slaughter in Guatemala to the world's attention. After Roht-Arriaza left Guatemala, she became an attorney specializing in international criminal law and transitional justice. She joined Bernabeu's legal team on the Guatemalan genocide case at the Spanish National Court. She is currently a professor at the University of California's Hastings College of Law in San Francisco, which she teaches courses in international human rights law, international criminal law and reparations for past injustices. She authored the book *The Pinochet Effect: Transnational Justice in the Age of Human Rights*.

**Portrait photographs
by Dana Lixenberg**

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Ask audience members what their *granitos*—their tiny grains of sand or contributions to positive social change—might be.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

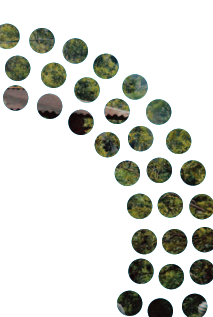
One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask him or her?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- What, if anything, did you find surprising in this film?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?



Spanish National Court Legal Team, led by Almudena Bernabeu, Madrid, 2009. (L to R: Naomi Roht-Arriaza, Kate Doyle, filmmaker Pamela Yates, Almudena Bernabeu and Susie Kemp).

Photo courtesy of Skylight Pictures





The Anatomy of Genocide

Kate Doyle says that the origins of the Guatemalan genocide, “like any genocide anywhere in the world were racism and fear, and greed for power and land.” Explain how each of these elements leads to genocide.

In footage from *When the Mountains Tremble*, activist and leader Rigoberta Menchú says, “I’m going to tell you my story, which is the story of all the Guatemalan people. Since the Spanish stole our ancestors’ land 500 years ago, we have borne so much injustice. Our legacy has been pain, suffering and misery.” What is the connection between Spanish colonialism and the genocide that is the subject of **Granito**?

The filmmaker says that she went to Guatemala in 1982 to make a film about a “hidden war.” How is it possi-

Guatemalan Army Soldiers at Finca La Perla, in the Ixil region, 1982. Many people displaced due to the scorched earth policies of the Guatemalan military, came here.

Photo courtesy of Jean-Marie Simon

ble for a war to be “hidden”? Who has to be complicit to keep a war hidden?

What is the significance of Ríos Montt saying on film, “If I can’t control the army, what am I doing here?”

How does what you learned from the film about the response of Guatemala’s military dictatorship to popular protest inform your understanding of current uprisings, such as those occurring as part of the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring? Are there things we can learn from the Guatemalan experience that could help prevent other genocides?



Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez explains the approach used by Guatemala's dictators by paraphrasing Mao Zedong, saying, "As water is for fish, so the people are for guerrillas. The fish without water die. The guerrillas without the people die." For Guatemala's military dictatorship, this meant operating as if there was no distinction between guerrillas (actual combatants) and their civilian supporters. That made the elimination of entire villages fair game. In your view, is there a difference between a person engaged in armed struggle and a person who supports or gives aid to those who are fighting? How and why would you distinguish between a guerilla and a civilian?

Nineth Montenegro at a GAM (Mutual Support Group) Rally of families who were searching for their disappeared relatives in the 1980s. Nineth's husband Fernanco García was disappeared in 1984.

Photo courtesy of Jean-Marie Simon

The Pursuit of Justice

The filmmaker opens with this question: "How does each of us weave our own responsibilities into the pattern of history?" How would you answer her?

What do you learn from the film about what is required to prosecute a person successfully for human rights violations or genocide?

Several people in the film put themselves at risk in order to procure evidence against the generals. Fredy Peccerelli receives a graphic death threat. What do you think you would do in his shoes? Under what circumstances, if any, would you put your life at risk in the pursuit of justice?

Almudena Bernabeu approaches the filmmaker because she believes that her 1982 film could provide important evidence for the prosecution of Ríos Montt. What are the pros and cons of admitting documentary film footage as evidence at trial? How would you distinguish between credible footage and propaganda?

Doyle notes, “Human rights investigators traditionally have had to rely almost exclusively on testimony, witnesses, survivors, people coming and telling their stories,” but that it is “very, very difficult to build an entire case on witness testimony.” If you were a judge, what types of evidence would a prosecutor need to convince you? Would survivor testimony suffice? Why or why not?

Prosecutors bring cases involving Guatemalan genocide to the Spanish national court because that court claims “universal jurisdiction,” i.e., the right to prosecute the worst crimes, even if they take place in a country other than Spain. Do you accept the concept of “universal jurisdiction”? What are its benefits and drawbacks?

Reconciliation and Healing

In your view, does proof of orders from commanders exonerate the soldiers who carried out those orders? How might Guatemala hold those soldiers accountable in ways that would foster reconciliation?

Peccerelli says, “Guatemala has never accepted what happened. And I don’t think there’s a way of moving forward without doing this. It doesn’t allow us to heal. It doesn’t allow us to mourn. And Guatemala’s a very sick country right now. And a very sad country.” From what you’ve seen in the film, what currently impedes reconciliation and healing? What could be done to help that process? What did you hear people say about what Guatemalans need in order to heal?

Antonio Caba talks about the government and private developers building dams, power plants and mines on massacre sites. Discuss the pros and cons of these actions. How might Guatemala pursue infrastructure development and reconciliation at the same time? What



Francisco Soto, Director of the Center for Human Rights Legal Action, arriving at work in Guatemala City with his bodyguard.

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg

about the rights of the indigenous communities nearby the mega project sites?

Pancho Soto says, “If there’s no justice, history repeats and repeats and repeats. That’s why it’s so important to prosecute these cases, not only abroad, but also inside Guatemala, so that the Guatemalan system will be capable of administering justice, as a guarantee against history repeating itself.” In your view, what is the link between legal justice (pursued through a court system) and the prevention of future atrocities? At this point, what would justice in Guatemala look like?

What is the meaning and significance of the film’s title?

Peccerelli says that his work identifying victims changes the lives of surviving family members. What do you think changes? What do you think it means to someone like Alejandra García to locate the body of her disappeared father and to hold accountable those who murdered him?

Caba leads a screening of *When the Mountains Tremble* for the elders and youngsters in his community, telling them, “You are the eyes of our people.” Why would it be important

to Caba to teach this history to the children in particular? What is the difference between sharing the stories of the disappeared and indoctrination? Who besides the children in Caba's community should know this story? Given the role the United States played in these events, is it important for U.S. students to learn about them? Why or why not?

Do you think the U.S. government has ever been complicit in a genocide? How might U.S. citizens act to prevent their government from becoming complicit in a genocide?

Menchú asks supporters of her political party to take the following pledge:

Please raise your hands, not too high, not too low, and without fear. In the name of our ancestors, grandfathers and grandmothers. In the name of the sons and daughters of our Mother Earth. In the name of the peoples of Guatemala, do you solemnly swear that you'll work for a more decent, just, democratic and inclusive country?

Compare the values of this oath to the U.S. pledge of allegiance. What are the similarities and differences? What values are expressed in Menchú's pledge that might lead the United States to oppose or support her candidacy for president of Guatemala?

The Role of the United States

Doyle acknowledges that the genocide was "fundamentally a Guatemalan project" but goes on to say that "the United States was present at the creation of what became a uniquely savage counterinsurgency. And in that sense the United States helped build and then institutionalize both the doctrine, the mindset, and the apparatus, the technological capability. The United States helped create the machine, which would go on to commit the massacres." Given the relationship between the United States and the Guatemalan leaders who ordered the genocide, what, if any, responsibility does the United States have to help Guatemala heal? How might the United States contribute to that process? How might U.S. citizens help contribute to the process?

In historical footage, U.S. president Ronald Reagan describes the relationship between the United States and Guatemala, saying, "All our neighbors ask of us is assistance in training and arms to protect themselves while they build a better, freer life." Menchú describes the same relationship this way:

"When the U.S. government sends aid to Guatemala, whether it's military aid, advisors or economic aid, they must understand that they are contributing di-



Rosa Caba in Ilóm, Guatemala. An Ixil Mayan, she says red in her clothing represents the blood shed in the genocide

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg

rectly to a worsening blood bath." Compare and contrast the two descriptions. What are all the possible explanations accounting for the differences?

In your view, should U.S. leaders who provided support for Guatemala's dictators also be tried for human rights violations? Why or why not?

Put yourself in survivor Antonio Caba's shoes and imagine his possible reactions to flying to the United States and hearing a flight attendant welcome him to Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. What do you think might go through his mind on hearing Reagan's name honored in this way?



The Role of Media

What do you learn from the film about the role of documentarians and journalists in democratic movements? How does corporate ownership of major media outlets change the role of journalists and filmmakers? How about government control of major media outlets? What are the consequences for societies in which there are no independent media voices or where those voices are marginalized or forced underground?

Co-Filmmakers of *GRANITO* and partners in Skylight Pictures
L to R: Peter Kinoy, Paco de Onís, and Pamela Yates, New York.

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg

When you listen to Gustavo Meoño, who co-founded the Guerilla Army of the Poor, what do you hear him say about his reasons for getting involved in armed resistance? What values was he fighting for? Compare Meoño's explanations with things that you have heard or read in mainstream U.S. media accounts about guerillas like him. How do the portrayals compare to each other?

The filmmaker understands that her footage of revolutionaries and their supporters could endanger them. What does a filmmaker owe to subjects?

The filmmaker presents evidence that the Guatemalan military blamed its own massacres on the guerillas. The survivors know the truth, so who are they attempting to mislead with this misinformation? Why wouldn't the military simply take credit for actions that it considered a justified response necessary to suppress a dangerous insurgency?

Peccerelli receives death threats, evidence that not all Guatemalans support his efforts. Do you see his work as a threat to the stability of Guatemala or as patriotic service to his country (or both or neither)? How do we decide who gets to wear labels such as "patriot" or "revolutionary"?



The recently discovered Archives of the Guatemalan National Police that detail forced disappearances and murders of opponents to the military dictatorship. Over 80 million police documents were uncovered here.

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php



Community Strategy Meeting in the highland town of San Andrés Sajcabaja.

Photo courtesy of Skylight Pictures

Taking Action

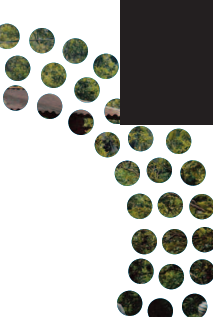
- Contribute your *granito* by getting involved in the Granito: Every Memory Matters online archive. Realize the power of media to create social change as director Pamela Yates did by making her film. This project connects Guatemala and the Guatemalan diaspora through an intergenerational, interactive public archive of memories that uncovers the history of the Guatemalan genocide. Interview people in your community using digital recording devices, and contribute to the online archive—you may find your community has more of a connection to Guatemala than you imagined. For a description of this project, and to learn how to get involved visit <http://granitomem.com/> or email info@granitomem.com
- Create your own “granito campaign” to recognize and empower people working to better your community. Base the campaign on the idea underlying the film’s title—a Mayan concept that each person contributes a tiny grain of sand, and when those grains of sand join together they can change the landscape. Rigoberta Menchú notes that the concept unites collective and individual struggle, and that in this system no one is more heroic than anyone else; everyone is a hero. Identify and publicize all the heroes in your community and encourage every person to put in his or her own grain of sand.



Ríos Montt in courtroom
Photo courtesy of Skylight Pictures

Taking Action

- Convene a debate about the use of secret government documents in the prosecution of Ríos Montt and others who have committed atrocities. Address the question of whose interests are served and whose are harmed by keeping government documents about Guatemala classified, as well as general policy in terms of declassifying government documents (including C.I.A. records). Also, ask panelists to address the realities of the digital world, where fewer records are kept on paper. What policies should be developed to ensure that vital documents are preserved?
- Work with your school district to find ways to include the history of U.S. interventions in Latin America in the secondary school curriculum. Find out what is already included and be prepared to offer resources and training to teachers that would help them fill any gaps.
- Hold a teach-in on the links between Guatemala's attempt to suppress political organizing among poor and indigenous peoples with similar actions in other Latin American nations (e.g., Chile, Argentina and El Salvador). Ask speakers to discuss the relationship between those events and the current approach of the U.S. government to political leaders in countries like Venezuela and Bolivia. Include opportunities for survivors to tell their stories.





Interact with GRANITO at PBS.org

POV's Webby Award-winning website offers a broad range of exclusive online content to enhance the broadcast of **Granito**. Watch the full film online for free for a limited time following the broadcast (June 29, 2012 to Sept. 27, 2012), download this discussion guide, lesson plans and other viewing resources, view photos from the film and interact with the filmmaker through video interviews and an online Q-and-A soon after the documentary airs on POV.

What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about **Granito** by posting a comment at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/granito>

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

FILMMAKER WEBSITE

<http://skylightpictures.com/films/granito/> and www.granitofilm.com -

This site offers news, reviews and information about screenings and related projects. There is also a robust Facebook page at <http://tinyurl.com/7c5nxhm>

Organizations associated with people featured In *Granito*

THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

www.cja.org

This group's website includes background on the situation in Guatemala, as well as details about Almudena Bernabeu's prosecution of the genocide case in both English and Spanish.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE: GUATEMALA PROJECT

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/guatemala/index.htm>

The National Security Archive provides access to the actual government documents gathered by Kate Doyle, as well as the Guatemalan military documents used as evidence. There are documents in both English and Spanish.

FUNDACIÓN DE ANTROPOLOGÍA FORENSE DE GUATEMALA

www.fafg.org

This foundation offers information on the methods and findings of forensic anthropologists like Fredy Peccerelli who are working to find and identify the disappeared in Guatemala. Information is available in both Spanish and English.

ARCHIVO HISTÓRICO DE LA POLICÍA NACIONAL (AHPN)

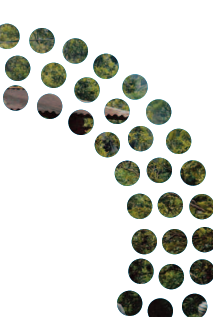
www.archivohistoricopn.org/

Gustavo Meoño's work is chronicled on this website. Information provided includes the history of the project, related legislation and findings. Available only in Spanish. The University of Texas hosts a digital archive of AHPN documents at <https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/>. This site includes background information in English.

CENTRO PARA LA ACCIÓN LEGAL EN DERECHOS HUMANOS

www.caldh.org/

People like Pancho Soto at this Guatemala-based organization defend human rights and have been active in efforts to hold Guatemala's former dictators accountable for genocide. They are involved in the genocide case against Ríos Montt. The site is in Spanish only.





FUNDACIÓN RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ TUM

<http://www.frmt.org/en/>

Rigoberta Menchú's foundation provides information about her current work in Guatemala and elsewhere, as well as a link to her blog (in Spanish).

MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP: CASO FERNANDO GARCÍA

<http://casofernandogarcia.org/>

This website, in English and Spanish, shares information about Alejandra García's attempts to hold the perpetrators to account for her father Fernando García's disappearance in 1984. Statements from Alejandra García are included.

Additional sources on Guatemala and human rights

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/guatemala

This group's 2012 report on Guatemala specifically addresses the status of human rights in Guatemala. The site also offers a podcast about Granito at <http://www.hrw.org/audio/2011/03/16/film-takes-quest-justice-guatemala>

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL CLARIFICATION: GUATEMALA—MEMORY OF SILENCE

<http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html>

An English translation of the official conclusions of the Commission for Historical Clarification, which was established through the 1994 Oslo Accords to investigate and report impartially on human rights violations that occurred during what the report calls Guatemala's "three decades of fratricidal war." The report is made available online by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

NETWORK IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA (NISGUA)

www.nisgua.org

On its website, this group posts news reports and opportunities for activism, as well as background information on historical injustices and current efforts to support democracy in Guatemala. For additional calls to action on behalf of people seeking social justice in Guatemala, look at the work of the **Guatemala Human Rights Commission** at www.ghrc-usa.org.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

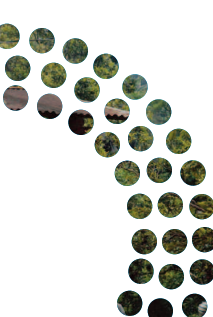
<http://ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/guatemala>

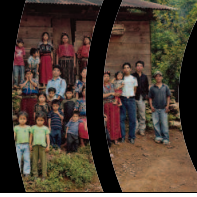
This organization specializes in legal redress for atrocities. It offers news, research, and publications related to the prosecution of those responsible for the genocide in Guatemala.

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

<http://www.facing.org/>

This group aims to use education to combat prejudice and nurture democracy. Its website includes a collection of educator resources for teaching about genocide. It also features an online self-paced workshop, an online version of a study guide for teaching the film *The Reckoning*, three original film modules created by Skylight Pictures and a variety of other resources related to issues of justice and the International Criminal Court.





Delve Deeper

RELATED BOOKS

"THE GUATEMALAN READER: HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS" BY GREG GRANDIN (EDITOR), DEBORAH T. LEVENSON (EDITOR), ELIZABETH OGLESBY (EDITOR)

"BITTER FRUIT: THE STORY OF THE AMERICAN COUP IN GUATEMALA", BY STEPHEN C. SCHLESINGER AND STEPHEN KINZER

"SILENCE ON THE MOUNTAIN: STORIES OF TERROR, BETRAYAL, AND FORGETTING IN GUATEMALA"
BY DANIEL WILKINSON

"THE ART OF POLITICAL MURDER: WHO KILLED THE BISHOP?" BY FRANCISCO GOLDMAN

"QUIET GENOCIDE 1981-1983" BY ETELLE HIGONNET (EDITOR) AND MARCIE MERSKY.

English translation of the Commission for Historical Clarification's findings on genocide.

"BURIED SECRETS: TRUTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA" BY VICTORIA SANFORD

"PARADISE IN ASHES: A GUATEMALAN JOURNEY OF COURAGE, TERROR AND HOPE" BY BEATRIZ MANZ

RELATED ARTICLES

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www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB373

RELATED FILMS

WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE (PREQUEL TO **GRANITO**) DIRECTED BY PAMELA YATES AND NEWTON THOMAS SIGEL, PRODUCED BY PETER KINOY
http://skylightpictures.com/films/when_the_mountains_tremble

TO ECHO THE PAIN OF MANY
DIRECTED BY ANA LUCÍA CUEVAS
www.facebook.com/pages/El-Eco-del-Dolor-de-Mucha-GenteTo-Echo-the-Pain-of-the-Many/119073521447246

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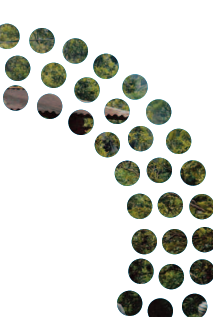
DANA LIXENBERG'S PORTRAITS OF THE PEOPLE IN GRANITO IN A 3 MINUTE SLIDESHOW
<http://vimeo.com/29228807>

DANIEL HERNÁNDEZ-SALAZAR
SO THAT ALL SHALL KNOW

JEAN-MARIE SIMON
www.primavera-tirania.com

JAMES HERNANDEZ
www.mimundo.org

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To order **Granito** for educational use, go to <http://www.newday.com/films/granito.html>, call 718.797.3125 or email flannery@skylightpictures.com.



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POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

POV Community Engagement and Education www.pbs.org/pov/outreach

POV develops and implements national Community Engagement & Education campaigns. Our team works with educators, community-based organizations and local public television stations to present free screenings of POV films and to develop and distribute accompanying educational resource materials nationwide.

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You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage for the latest news from POV Community Engagement & Education.



Front cover: The Caba family in front of their home in Ixil highlands of Guatemala. The army massacred 95 people in their village in 1982 during the genocide.

Photo courtesy of Dana Lixenberg



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