



Somos.

Production Notes

<p><u>INTRODUCTION</u> <u>BY FERNANDA MELCHOR</u></p>

“*Somos.*” is a fictional story based on the investigative report “How the U.S. Triggered a Massacre in Mexico,” written by acclaimed American journalist Ginger Thompson. Her exceptional piece incorporates the stories and testimonies of dozens of people who experienced first-hand the events of March 2011 in Allende, Coahuila, a small community near the U.S. border.

“*Somos.*” is the first TV production to recount the event from the victims’ perspective. It centers around the experience of violence in a small community in the context of rural life — a subject that’s rarely been explored on Mexican screens before.

“*Somos.*” was created by James Schamus, who also co-wrote the series with Mexican writers Monika Revilla and me, Fernanda Melchor. The resulting screenplay exposes the tragic and horrific aftermath of drug trafficking in a small town in northern Mexico. It features interlocking storylines with multiple protagonists, each at the center of their own universe. They all go about their lives, unaware of their imminent death sentence or reprieve.

After reading Thompson's oral history, filmmaker James Schamus was struck by the complex story surrounding these events and the fact that the tragedy was not more widely known. He immediately started reflecting on ways the story could be told through a different narrative — one centered on the experience of the victims.

“I immediately took it as a challenge,” said Schamus, “to reframe real people’s lived experiences in a distinct work — a fictional narrative that would break away from the usual genres that so compellingly mediate our understanding of how violence structures so much of our ‘day-to-day living,’ regardless of how close or distant that violence is from us.” The idea was not to focus solely on how drug trafficking affects the lives of ordinary people in Mexico, but to construct a multiple narrative that would serve as a real discourse on the various forms of violence (institutional, physical, sexual, gender-based, domestic, etc.) that characterize modern life.

The idea took shape and developed over time, and in 2018, Schamus finally acquired the rights to Ginger Thompson’s story and began what would be a three-year adventure. He contacted the Netflix Mexico team (who responded enthusiastically to his vision and its underlying challenges), took intensive Spanish classes, and managed a writers’ room in Mexico City. And together with an outstanding team of Mexican producers, directors and actors, he would get “*Somos.*” off the ground, despite unexpected stumbling blocks, such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As one of the writers of “*Somos.*”, I must admit that the task of creating a realistic and compassionate series that faithfully and sensitively deals with a subject as lurid as the Allende Massacre was an immense challenge.

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Instrumental to this endeavor were James's experience and guidance, my colleague Monika Revilla's creative talents ("Dance of the 41," "The House of Flowers" and "Someone Has to Die"), and Maynée Cortés' exhaustive research. Over several weeks, confined in an office on Paseo de la Reforma that served as our "writer's den," I shared countless hours of intensive work with my colleagues.

One of the key features of the "**Somos**." screenplay is the number of main characters and storylines it has compared to conventional series. Rather than establishing a pre-defined plot, much of the writing was focused on creating a mosaic of believable and complex characters that could depict a wide range of possible human experiences of violence. We had to draw on dramatic elements of Ginger Thompson's report, which denounced the DEA's actions and role in the massacre. However, the challenge of writing "**Somos**." was also to portray the everyday lives of men, women and teenagers who are surrounded by violence and who, despite everything, have to carry on and seek happiness as best they can.

Out of respect for those who actually experienced the real events, we decided early on that, while we would use elements and anecdotes drawn from real testimonies, we would create our characters from scratch; no character in the series is based on a single real person, but all of them are grounded in the shared, communal reality of Allende in 2011.

This is how the various storylines of "**Somos**." took shape:

- **The ranchers' story** tells of the twists and turns faced by the Linares family, the owners of a prosperous ranch on Allende's outskirts. It's a story of family tensions: a patriarch troubled by the violence of modern times, a young son who rebels against his father's authority and begins to associate with unsavory characters.
- **Paquito and Doña Chayo's story** tells of the surprising love between a tough woman, inured to life's hardships, and the good-for-nothing son-in-law with a heart of gold who has moved in with her and her daughter, and for whom Doña Chayo will eventually risk everything to save.
- **The sisters' story:** Two estranged sisters face pivotal moments in their lives. Irene, married to recovering alcoholic Chema, is unsure about becoming a mother. Érika, the town veterinarian, is separated from her husband and is considering divorce while she deals with a strange case of dead cattle belonging to the rancher Anselmo.
- **The hustlers' story:** Two drug traffickers, Héctor and Óscar (one Mexican, the other Texan), must partner up to save their lives, even though they hate each other's guts and can't trust one another.
- **The DEA agents' story:** Stephanie and Carlos, DEA agents who find out about two major drug lords operating in the town of Allende, get the chance to manipulate several small-time criminals in order to trap them. But their superiors at the agency seem to have other plans...
- **The teenagers' story:** Nancy, a restless and vivacious young girl, makes the local football team, much to the amazement of her best friends Armando and Tom. Samuel, a new boy with an enigmatic father, tries to join their group, with chilling consequences.
- **Flor María's story:** Captured by drug traffickers in her attempt to cross the border into the United States, Flor María, who's from Central America, is held prisoner in a seedy brothel. There she meets Nayeli, another girl trapped by the trafficking ring.

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For the writers, the series needed to feature strong and compelling female characters that would reflect present-day issues: women breaking gender stereotypes (Nancy); getting trapped by prostitution and trafficking rings (Flor María and Nayeli); being faced with the idea of motherhood (Aracely); standing up to lawlessness in spite of fear (Irene); or who, on the other hand, tread dangerously close to the fire to survive and protect their loved ones (Doña Chayo).

In order to make these various storylines realistic and meet the production challenge of visually recreating a rural town, it was essential to carry out extensive and painstaking research beforehand. With the help of consultant Maynné Cortés, and over a period of two years, the “*Somos.*” creative team reviewed extensive literature about the events that took place in Allende. The task was made complicated by a lack of official information about the massacre, and sources were difficult to locate. Additionally, in the words of Maynné Cortés, it was “a real emotional challenge, as the massacre was a harrowing event for many people. And although it happened ten years ago, the whole social structure of drug violence is still very much present in Mexico. The research was a constant reminder that things like this continue to happen with impunity.”

As a result of this information-gathering work, which also focused on researching the Cinco Manantiales region from a historical, economic, social and cultural perspective, we were able to bring the town of Allende to life as if it were fully-realized character in the plot.

Like the real town in Coahuila, the Allende in “*Somos.*” is also a small community of barely 20,000 inhabitants and a half-hour’s drive from the U.S. border at Eagle Pass, Texas. Nestled in the region known as Cinco Manantiales, the lands in Allende are greener and more fertile than other areas of the state of Coahuila. This explains the abundance of cattle ranches and walnut groves there.

As depicted in “*Somos.*”, life in Allende, as in other communities in northern Mexico, depends heavily on the constant flow of people, goods and ideas that regularly cross back and forth across the United States border. This powerful dynamic is reflected in its streets, the façades of the houses and businesses, and the way that its inhabitants dress and speak. This is boots and cowboy hat country, where jeans, bolo ties, flour tortillas and *pan de pulque* reign supreme. It’s the land of American football games, where people dance the polka and *cumbia norteña*. It’s also a place where the deeds of traffickers (made into true folk heroes by the *corrido* genre) are chanted with passion.

Indeed, in the Allende of “*Somos.*”, smuggling has practically always been a way of life ever since its foundation in the 17th century. The border between Coahuila and Texas used to be indistinct and far more porous than it is today, which facilitated the flow of people, animals and goods, whether legal or illegal. Smugglers, coyotes and *fayuqueros* were never really criminals in the townspeople’s eyes but rather business people. They were brave and ambitious, and they knew how to leverage their cunning and contacts to get rich like any other entrepreneur. Things changed from the 1970s onwards as competition increased, and numerous criminal groups sought to take control of these border regions that had always been considered “free zones.” And so it was that, sometime in the early 21st century, the quiet town of Allende found itself overrun by one of Mexico’s most powerful and terrifying drug cartels.

In a strategic move, the cartel’s drug lords set up shop in Allende. They took control of the town center, government institutions, local politics and commerce, as well as existing rackets such as prostitution and extortion. They even took over the administration of the Piedras Negras prison. They sought to blend into local society and gradually became owners of ranches, real estate, restaurants, bars, car washes and mobile phone stores in Allende, by force if necessary. They organized parties, dances and cockfights. They recruited young men to join their ranks and married into local families.

At this point, the storylines in “*Somos.*” begin to unfold, following the various characters’ lives as they find themselves having to confront these dilemmas. They will be compelled to make decisions that will turn their lives upside down: join the drug traffickers or resist the temptation of power and money? Fight them head on or betray

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them at the first opportunity? Carry on with their lives as if nothing happened, trying to ignore the escalating violence and fear, or try to change things? Fight for the community or allow it to be destroyed?

With the screenplay completed, filming for “*Somos*.” began in late 2019. It was primarily shot on location in and around Durango City, the capital of the state of Durango. Filming also took place in Gómez Palacio (where an empty maximum security prison was used to depict the Piedras Negras prison), Canatlán, Nombre de Dios, as well as the cities of Torreón, Coahuila and Los Angeles, California. The experienced executive producer, Sandra Solares, skillfully led an extraordinary team of Mexican filmmakers and actors who were fully committed to James Schamus’ project. The series’ relevance for them was so great that not even a temporary suspension of filming in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic could dampen their enthusiasm and dedication. “Nobody bailed,” as Sandra Solares once so aptly put it, proud of her crew’s commitment and determination.

In February 2020, weeks before an unexpected lockdown brought on by the pandemic, Monika Revilla and I were invited to visit the “*Somos*.” film set. It was an incredible experience because, for the first time, we were able to see Ana Solares’ production design with our own eyes. The stunningly realistic sets, carefully created by the art department, breathed life into the story, which, up until that point, Monika and I had only known in its written form.

It was also wonderful to meet the actors, who would bring to life characters such as Flor María (Caraly Sánchez), Nayeli (Fernanda Rivera), the Madam (Susana Villarreal) and Benjamín (Jero Medina), and have the chance to speak with them during breaks in between filming. It’s something very few writers get the privilege to experience: meeting their “creations” in the flesh!

While in Durango, we were also able to appreciate the tireless work by the film crew’s various departments: locations, sets, wardrobe, make-up, assistant directors, cameras, sound and light. The positive vibes among these people were palpable as they all worked together seamlessly with impressive coordination. They channeled their skills and talents toward a common purpose while braving the scorching desert sun during the day and the freezing wind at nightfall.

We were also able to observe directors Álvaro Curiel and Mariana Chenillo’s different working styles in action: While Álvaro is always dynamic, persistent, vocal, dressed in Bermuda shorts and a sweatshirt, Mariana is calm, reflective and detail-obsessed, with her sketches and notebooks in hand. We also had the chance to meet the cinematographer Nacho Prieto, who gave “*Somos*.” its beautiful and realistic aesthetic. We were also afforded the privilege of getting a glimpse into the workings of the editing room, where Soledad Salfate led a talented team of editors to sort out and make sense of all the footage. They also let us listen to some of musician Victor Hernández Stumpfhauser’s tracks, which he worked on with James to provide the series with an original, tragic and intensely moving score, matching the tone of “*Somos*.” itself. The series is truly unique, crafted with enthusiasm, dedication and the drive — an urgent drive, I might add — to tell human stories: stories that matter and transcend.

ABOUT “*SOMOS*.”

SUMMARY DETAILS:

Premiere and number of countries: June 30 in more than 190 countries

Created by: James Schamus

Directors: Álvaro Curiel (episodes 1, 2, 5 & 6), Mariana Chenillo (episodes 3 & 4)

Screenplay: Monika Revilla, Fernanda Melchor, James Schamus

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Based on: “[How the U.S. Triggered a Massacre in Mexico](#),” written by Ginger Thompson for *ProPublica*

Executive Producers: Sandra Solares, James Schamus

Co-Executive Producers: Monika Revilla, Fernanda Melchor

Production: Jaibol Films

Produced in Association with: Symbolic Exchange

Cast: Combination of non-actors and professional actors

Casting: Bernardo Velasco

Cinematography: Ignacio Prieto

Original Score: Victor Hernández Stumpfhauser

Music Supervisor: Lynn Fainchtein

Editing: Soledad Salfate

Color Timing: Sofie Friis Borup

Production Design: Ana Solares

Costume Design: Gilda Navarro

Makeup: Thalía Echeveste

Location Manager: Claudia Puebla

Postproduction: Carlos Morales and Vanessa Hernández

Screenplay and Research Assistant: Maynné Cortés

Number of episodes and length: Six episodes. Episodes 1 to 5 are approximately 45 minutes long; episode 6 is 71 minutes long.

SYNOPSIS:

Inspired by the explosive investigative article by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ginger Thompson, *Somos* imaginatively recreates the stories of the people of the small town of Allende in the days leading up to a shocking massacre. Created by James Schamus, and co-written with Mexico’s Monika Revilla and Fernanda Melchor, *Somos* tells the story of the drug wars from the victims’ perspective, giving voice to those whose lives were changed forever when, without forewarning, their town was struck by a tragedy triggered by a DEA operation gone wrong.

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS AND THEIR STORIES:

“*Somos*.” is a story with multiple protagonists, each at the center of their own universe. They all go about their lives, unaware of their imminent death sentence or reprieve. There are more main characters in Allende than the norm, and we proceed with the knowledge that each could easily be the star of their own show. Below is a summary of our heroes and anti-heroes, who are sometimes one and the same.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS on a [separate document](#), by Maynné Cortés

CASTING PROCESS

For casting director Bernardo Velasco, behind iconic ensembles in films such as “I’m No Longer Here,” “Museum,” “The Untamed” and “*Güeros*,” it was crucial to establish a balance between professional and non-professional actors. This was because one of creator James Schamus’ main objectives was to portray true-to-life characters that would facilitate a closer connection with the viewer. For Bernardo, the inhabitants’ northern-Mexican personalities and essence aren’t characteristics that can easily be imitated. These characteristics range from accents to gestures and body movements — they reflect the customs, the local culture, and sometimes even the climate of each region.

It was essential to create a cast of professional and non-professional actors who would naturally and respectfully embody the complexity of Allende’s inhabitants. At the same time, finding professional actors who could accommodate and form a working relationship with the non-professional actors was vital to the development of the project. From the very first meetings with James Schamus and the production team, we discussed the importance of having this collaboration, upon which trust would develop and serve as a basis for working on set. The first

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challenge in finding non-professional actors for the series was, apart from them having to fit the physical profile, convincing them that this is an important and serious job to which they have to commit themselves. This is because, although it's a great source of satisfaction, it's also a huge responsibility where people often struggle with fatigue, pressure, and the long and demanding days of filming.

Bernardo was fortunate to find non-professional actors with remarkable natural talent, generosity and exceptional dedication to understanding the directors' needs and bringing each part of the story to life.

During the scouting process, we did a casting call within the communities, on social media, and by word of mouth, and more than 300 people were interviewed for different roles. "In Durango, the main location where the series was shot, they are much more used to filmmaking. It's not such a big deal for them to see people from outside coming with cameras. But in Canatlán, which is primarily an apple-growing area, there is no contact with this world, and there can be much more resistance to being filmed and interviewed. So we had to tread carefully and be attuned to their perspective. It was in this part of the country that we found two of our lead characters," says Bernardo Velasco.

The casting process for professional actors took place at the same time in Mexico City. Besides looking for actors who had the necessary physical traits for each character, we looked for people with the willingness and flexibility to connect with the non-professional actors, work alongside them and set the tone for each scene.

Below is a list of the actors:

Non-Professional Actors:	Professional Actors:
Jesús Sida (Paquito) Salvador Montenegro (Silverio) Jimena Pagaza (Nancy) Germán Guzmán (Wilbur) Jesús Herrera (Armando) Mario Alberto Quiñones (Tom) Manuel de Jesús (Pablo) Óscar Guzmán (Mutante) Eduardo Humarán (Gilberto) Natalia Martínez (Aracely) Ulises Soto (Samuel) Fernando Martínez (Luis) Manuel Juárez (Prángano) Samantha Meza (Lucy) César Cazares (Gerardo) Julieta Herández (Sandra) Alba del Campo (Abuela) Julio Durán (Policía 2) Rafa Celestino (Policía 1) Leticia Fernández (Clara) Luis Mario (Hombre en la puerta) Susana Villarreal (Madam) Gabriela Melero (Vanesa) Isabel Peraza (Ana) Adriana Carrola (Vecina Wilbur)	Jero Medina (Benjamín) Arelí González Érika) Fernando Larrañaga (Isidro Linares) Armando Silva (Héctor Moreno) Iliana Donatlán (Irene) Mercedes Hernández (Doña Chayo) Everardo Arzate (Chema) Josué Guerra (Óscar) Caraly Sánchez (Flor María) Clementina Guadarrama (Lupita) Antonio López Torres (César Molina) Roberto Montiel (Don Anselmo) Fernanda Rivera (Nayeli) Natalia Solián (Cindy) Lisbi Cuéllar (Olympia) Alejandro Ruiz (Sr. Ronaldo) Martín Peralta (Carlos) Kerry Ardra (Stephanie) Hernán Romo (Julián) María Bosque (Audrey) Gilberto Alanís Mendoza (Comandante Enano) Christina Jolie Webb (Linda) Alicia Camps (Agustina) Vincent Webb (Oscarito) Dave Collins (Supervisor de la DEA)

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Octavio Rodríguez (Choky) Alexis Morales (Mike) Víctor Hugo Galván (Sr. Herrera) Liliana Martínez (Mamá de Vanessa) Gardel Blancarte (Inés) Ana Fischer (Sra. Peña)	Dale Carley (Voz del director) José Rodríguez López (Sacerdote)
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“Somos.” IN THE WORDS OF ITS MAKERS

“Somos.” is a complex story based on the tragic events that happened in 2011 at Allende, Coahuila; a story centered on the experience of the victims. “Somos.” is not only a word, it is a declaration, a statement. The makers and voices behind “Somos.” are many and diverse, and they shared their thoughts and experiences about the series.

I love the name that the project was finally given, because it includes all of us and has a truth. **“Somos.”** (We are.) Because we are the people that we are seeing... we are Paquito, innocent, noble. We are Aracely, a scared new mother. We are Doña Chayo, we would do anything to protect our family. We are Tom, that adolescent boy in love who wants to have his first time with his best friend. We are Benjamín, a man who has not yet solved what he wants to do with his life. We are Isidro, who would give our lives for our family. Each character feels so real that it makes you connect with the series' title.

- Janet Rodriguez (Second Assistant Director)

“Somos.” tells a story that for a long time couldn't be told. It's about a massacre that nobody knew about at the time. Ten years after the events, **“Somos.”** is a memorial. There never was a national dialogue about Allende. Perhaps this gives us the pretext to talk about what happened.

Unlike other shows that depict cartel violence, **“Somos.”** doesn't glamorize drug trafficking. Instead, it gives voice to the victims. It shows the human side of those of us who live in a state of violence, thereby recapturing personal perspectives. But beyond the tragedy, **“Somos.”** is about the characters, their daily lives, and life's little dramas.

- Monika Revilla (Writer and Co-Executive Producer)

“Somos.” tells the story of people who don't have a voice. It's as if the extras were to become lead roles, because their life is just as important. It's the story that never gets told.

- Stephanie Beauchef (Planner)

“Somos.” brings together a group of regular people and professional actors — each one taking us by the hand and walking us through the path of each character's life. They let us in on their dreams, desires and struggles in the context of a community's day-to-day activities, transforming the simplicity of country life into one of the most horrific accounts of the devastating power of unmitigated violence. It demands much-needed reflection from the filmmakers behind the scenes, the actors and the viewer facing the screen. It confronts us with the humanity behind the newsreel images and statistics of violence in Mexico. They give voice and put faces to the stories of these characters, who become as close and familiar as the people we live with every day.

-Bernardo Velasco (Casting Director)

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When I was offered to produce **“Somos.”** alongside James Schamus and Francisco Ramos, I thought it was a fantastic opportunity and challenge. As soon as I read the entire article by Ginger Thompson on which it is based, I realized that I had a crucial project in my hands, a story that had to be told and that was conceived to present the point of view of the people and the victims. Since then and up to this point, I believe that **“Somos.”** is one of the rawest and most thematically powerful projects that I’ve had the chance to help bring to life. It’s extremely sad, frustrating, human and moving. I’ve seen it many times myself, and each time I’m left with a strong message, a sense of reflection, and a strong need for change in this country. I hope this message goes far and wide.

- Sandra Solares (Executive Producer)

“Somos.” is a very human and realistic series of the sort that I don’t think has ever been seen before on Mexican TV. It’s a story of a small community in northern Mexico that’s been taken over by organized crime. It’s full of tension, drama and human situations that viewers can relate to, since many of the dilemmas and struggles faced by the characters are those that most Mexicans deal with on a daily basis: the extreme violence due to drug trafficking and crime, and the petty, yet no less impactful, violence that we experience every day. It’s a thrilling series, with lots of action-packed scenes, but it’s also a contemporary reflection on the human condition.

- Fernanda Melchor (Writer and Co-Executive Producer)

It was a tremendous challenge — not easy at all. Retelling this story is a commitment. It’s a matter of understanding the social dynamics of a town in northern Mexico, which, due to its border with the U.S., is at the forefront of drug trafficking activity. James always had a clear aesthetic, with specific visual references taken from real-life elements, thus depicting daily life in a documentary style.

For me, working on **“Somos.”** was very intense and demanded a lot of us, yet it was also satisfying in that we produced a show worth its weight in gold.

-Ana Solares (Production Design)

On my first day, it was only then that I realized what it felt like to step in front of a camera, how a scene gets filmed and everything that surrounds the process. I soon got used to it, and let myself just live in the world. I remember when we entered the prison at Gómez Palacio to do our scenes there, it made me feel as if I was just another prisoner.

- Jesús Sida (Actor, "Paquito")

I'll never forget our first day on the prison set. It was early in the morning and still dark, I had never been in a place even remotely close to a prison. The trucks were parked at the entrance and I had to go in to set the signage for the catering area. I hopped into the van that had brought me that day. Neither the driver nor me could see a thing aside from the walls that were lit up. When we went through the tunnel to go inside of the prison walls, I felt a chill from my head to my toes -- it was as if someone was telling me that I would never be able to leave that place.

- Brenda Barranco (Production Assistant)

When I read the scripts, I was shocked by the way the story was told, that other side, the most vulnerable, that of the victims and the missing, who are never talked about, who also had wishes, dreams, and a life.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

For me, **“Somos.”** is an entire universe captured in detail right before its demise. It’s a world that, from the get-go, warns us that it’s going to be destroyed. And knowing that from the start, it’s a painful road to travel, yet it still manages to share its tender moments with us all along the way. It does this through truth, humor, acceptance, and an intimate observation of what makes life meaningful and worthwhile. For me, **“Somos.”** is a testament to humanity. It’s a story to be told during tough times — like that which we’re going through right now in the country and in humanity as a whole.

- Mariana Chenillo (Director)

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“Somos.” forcefully presents what happened in Allende in 2011. But it does it through the small and intimate details that constructed the whole story. The bad luck of making a joke in the wrong place at the wrong time could get one of your own killed.

- Mercedes Hernández (Actor, "Doña Chayo")

“Somos.” is an intimate look at the stories behind a painful and tragic episode in Mexico. It's the untold story of a community trapped by destiny. But beyond being a tragic tale, it's an everyday, human story that allows us to see ourselves in it. I think **“Somos.”** is the faces, expressions and feelings behind the events that took place in Allende. However, it also reminds us of the rawness and complexity of our social fabric — a microcosm reflecting a national reality.

- Víctor Hernández Stumpfhauser (Original Score)

From the very first casting call, I could tell this was a unique project. Even though the approach to the casting process was different, they took the time to explain the scene to me and we then took as much time as needed to work through it.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

The fact that we were telling something real, something that was embedded in people's memory, was a great responsibility. Playing characters based in real persons made the construction of our characters a very detailed and careful process.

- Jero Medina (Actor, "Benjamín")

The cast selection was unique, there were no leading roles, and no one wanted to eclipse anyone else, the others, so there was a lot of conscience and honesty that came through by how we were telling the story.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

Sometimes being on set was like being swallowed up into the world of our characters. I remember an exterior late-night scene with me and all the guys playing the thugs gathered around a bonfire. Just sitting there, listening to the norteño music, I really felt Benjamin's persona. I was very much into those clothes, that music, talking with that northern accent - everything is tattooed in my memory.

- Jero Medina (Actor, "Benjamín")

As someone from Coahuila, working on the series was even more special because it's something that we lived very closely 10 years ago. When I was called in to audition I realized that we would be shooting things that we actually lived or at least heard about in the news.

- Salvador Montenegro (Actor, "Silverio")

For many Mexicans and more so, for us who are originally from the north of the country that have lived more than a decade of violence caused by "organized crime", we have tried to look the other way as a coping mechanism for survival in the face of so much pain, as if not looking at it, could erase what was happening from our memory or from reality.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

It is also easy to see that regardless of anyone's origin or social status, drug trafficking is a phenomenon that affects the social structure and invades communities like humidity, corroding everything, it is very difficult to escape.

- Mercedes Hernández (Actor, "Doña Chayo")

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Much of the shoot was done in the small town of Canatlán, north of Durango, and many of the people of the town worked as extras and would often gather to watch the work. They were so respectful and supportive, perhaps as a result of a tradition that has been passed from generation to generation, since the time when John Wayne was there so often.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

We add texture to each of the characters involved in an event forgotten by the world. The great challenge is to make them visible again. And they are indeed made visible in this story.

- Gilda Navarro (Costume Designer)

*In English it requires a pronoun and a verb to translate “Somos.”: we are or we exist,
but in Spanish, with one word you say it all.
One word and one team, how it all came to life by working humbly together:*

The writers’ room was unique in itself. The three of us came from different disciplines — James from film, Fernanda from literature, and myself from television — yet I think this diversity in perspectives really enriched the project. Fernanda was instrumental in the creation of the characters. She always added humanizing elements or mannerisms to the characters that helped us understand them.

- Monika Revilla (Writer and co-Executive Producer)

I’ve been blessed in my long career to have been able to work in many countries, across many cultures and languages. But at my age, to dive into a new culture, a new language (one I’m still painfully and slowly learning!), and to learn from so many visionary collaborators, that is a gift I did not take lightly. It came with a great responsibility – to listen, and to keep always present the voices of the people I first got to know in Ginger Thompson’s moving oral history of the massacre in Allende. Luckily, our writing team, including our researcher Maynné Cortés, brought that same sense of responsibility to our task. Our days working in Mexico City together were hard but precious, and there was something uncanny about entering our “writers room” each morning and looking at all the index cards and post-its and images and maps covering the walls, and seeing them all come to life over time as our characters and their hopes and dreams.

-James Schamus (Writer, Executive Producer)

One of the things I most enjoyed about working on this project was having the opportunity to meet and collaborate with a team of incredibly talented and, most importantly, profoundly compassionate and generous people.

I think that had a lot to do with James, who always made it a priority to involve people in the project who had the awareness and compassion to tell a story like “**Somos**.” James is someone from whom I’ve learned a lot, both professionally and personally. The way he tries to make everyone feel seen and important, as well as his unwavering openness and empathy toward other visions, narratives and perspectives, nurtured the project and all the people involved with him.

-Maynné Cortés (Screenplay and Research Assistant)

The cast were mainly real people, very different from our usual cinematographic universe, filled with beautiful energy, very humane, warm and humble. I think that we all learned very unique things from them.

- Agustín Vega (Wardrobe Assistant)

It’s inspiring to witness the thoughtful and meaningful approach with which James tackles this difficult subject. He emphasizes the compassionate aspect of the work by building a bridge between the story and the cast, including both professional and non-professional actors. This approach has been decisive in achieving the ease with which he portrays his deeply complex characters. It’s been fascinating to work side-by-side with directors who are both

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determined and eager to move forward decisively. He incorporates his vision and awareness to piece together nuances, focusing on subtler moments.

- Bernardo Velasco (Casting Director)

Working alongside James is a privilege and a pleasure. He's a well-spoken, obsessive, perfectionist, articulate and coherent person who knows what he wants and how to put it together. As for the Mexican team, we had two great directors, Álvaro Curiel and Mariana Chenillo, accompanied by all the crew's top-notch departments. It was all like a well-oiled machine. It wasn't an easy gig — there were many locations, an ensemble of non-professional actors, at least four countries involved in different areas working with us, and we produced half of the series during the middle of the pandemic. But I genuinely believe that everyone did an exemplary job in their own way. And apart from the standard hiccups of any project that we experienced from time to time, we worked very well together. I can say that I'd do it all over again with everyone: our fantastic editor, our cinematographer, the music department, the post-production team, the wardrobe department, the art department, the sound, the casting director, our planner, make-up, my production managers — they're truly a great team.

- Sandra Solares (Executive Producer)

The crew on “**Somos.**” was by far the best crew I've ever worked with. During the development and pre-production of the series, I had a very specific goal: to step back as far as I could from the actual filming, to give space to everyone to live and breathe the project without feeling the need any more to ask me what was the best way to solve the inevitable problems and questions that come up. So I was able to be an observer, and to watch how the cast and crew worked with such respect for each other, almost a kind of tenderness. I think that spirit really finds its way on to the screen. It's what I am most proud of with the series, that everyone, from the grips and electricians to the creative heads of departments felt the same sense of mission.

- James Schamus (Writer, Executive Producer)

One of the firefighters who trained us and accompanied us as an extra turned to me, after a long, freezing night of work, and said: "I thought that this was going to be easy as it looks in the movies, but I think I prefer being a fireman."

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

I learned a lot from James. But perhaps it's the generosity in his leadership that stands out the most. I can think of few people as busy as James, yet he always found the time to chat with all the cast and crew members, provide instructions when needed, or update us with a quick FaceTime session. That's how James created a sense of community around the series that drove everyone to do their best.

James was adamant that he wanted the series to have an authentic feel, so he was cautious not to inadvertently ‘Americanize’ the show. His experience working on films in other countries was palpable. He was extremely sensitive to cultural differences and, most importantly, he listened.

The writers' room was unique in itself. The three of us came from different disciplines — James from film, Fernanda from literature, and myself from television — yet I think this diversity in perspectives really enriched the project.

Fernanda was instrumental in the creation of the characters. She always added humanizing elements or mannerisms to the characters that helped us understand them.

We writers were the first ones to begin working on the series, so it's been an almost three-year process for us. During that time, James was coming to Mexico very often, then Fernanda and I headed over to New York, and, finally, we visited the set in Durango just before the pandemic broke out. We've shared so many experiences, which, for me, were meaningful beyond the series.

- Monika Revilla (Writer and Co-Executive Producer)

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It was a great challenge to work with the non-actors because many techniques we professionals lean on had to be unlearned, I hold a great amount of respect for the way the non-professionals engaged with their characters and their scenes, which was undoubtedly a great learning experience for all of us.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

It was a real privilege to work on this series with James Schamus, my colleague Monika Revilla and the whole team. This was my first experience in a writer's room, and I must say that I was blown away by the dedication, discipline and enthusiasm with which James guided us to create the screenplay for "*Somos*." and bring this particular universe to life. I feel very grateful to James and Netflix for this chance to put my writing chops to the test. I think everyone from my generation has dreamed at some point of being behind the screenplay of a show or film. Thanks to James' trust in my abilities as a novelist and storyteller of Mexican reality, this dream came true. It's an experience that's taught me many creative and technical lessons. And because of James' inspirational leadership, I've also gained some personal insights. He's a creator who's genuinely interested in Mexico, its stories, and its problems, and he's one of the most generous people I've ever met.

- Fernanda Melchor (Writer and Co-Executive Producer)

It was a tremendous challenge — not easy at all. Retelling this story is a commitment. It's a matter of understanding the social dynamics of a town in northern Mexico, which, due to its border with the U.S., is at the forefront of drug trafficking activity. James always had a clear aesthetic, with specific visual references taken from real-life elements, thus depicting daily life in a documentary style.

- Ana Solares (Production Designer)

James always made it a priority to involve people in the project who had the awareness and compassion to tell a story like "*Somos*.". James is someone from whom I've learned a lot, both professionally and personally. The way he tries to make everyone feel seen and important, as well as his unwavering openness and empathy toward other visions, narratives and perspectives, nurtured the project and all the people involved with him.

- Maynné Cortés (Writers and Research Assistant)

When you are comfortably settled in your comfort zone, there can be no more significant challenge than working for James Schamus: an inveterate lover of film and a writer who solemnly creates complex universes that deal with death, in defiance of all clichés. His work is a tour de force, a masterclass and true artistry. He's a Hollywood producer who's decided to confront the system. James reinvents himself and invites you to join him in this adventure, carefully selecting the best group of technical and creative individuals that he can find in a country with a rich cinematographic tradition.

- Álvaro Curiel (Director)

Sunday, March 8, 2020 was International Women's Day, a day marked by marches and demonstrations across Mexico, including in Durango, where the series' cast and crew were working. The following day, March 9, a national women's strike was called.

During pre-production, I had the biggest loss of my life, the death of my sister, caused by a femicide. During the demonstration of March 8, the whole crew joined the cause, we made t-shirts with her name that everyone wore, throughout the whole day. We all marched for justice for her in the streets of Durango. Every time I think of it my eyes tear up - I have no words to thank everyone for that wonderful gesture.

- Agustín Vega (Wardrobe Assistant)

When the women didn't show up for work, it made the men notice how much they are needed, and I liked that this production made an effort to support the cause.

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- Agustín "Tyson" Rodríguez (Driver)

A day that was unforgettable to me was the one that took place during the International Day for Women... The power of their absence made all of them become more present.

- Everardo Arzate (Actor, "Chema")

When the pandemic arrived in Durango, the filmmakers realized the only responsible decision was to shut down production, not knowing when, if ever, they could come back to finish the series. After months of detailed planning, Somos. resumed production in August 2020, with the team adhering to stringent health protocols that made the experience of filming even more arduous and challenging.

The pandemic froze time, and we had to work on the show for many more months than initially planned. And, for me, the process of preparing and filming the project was a blessing and lodestar amidst the general turmoil of 2020. It was much easier to begin to understand and process the changes we've experienced as a society knowing that, despite everything, our work as storytellers is still essential, necessary and possible.

- Mariana Chenillo (Director)

While we were filming, we started hearing rumors of a pandemic, but it felt very far away from us. But in March [2020], the shoot was suspended and we all went home, because it was impossible to keep shooting safely under those conditions. The emergency was very real.

- Salvador Montenegro (Actor, "Silverio")

As production was getting underway the pandemic was just arriving in Mexico, and soon a case had been detected in Durango, where we were shooting, which caused a kind of fear and uncertainty about what might happen, and if we would be able to complete our work.

- Clementina Guadarrama (Actor, "Lupita")

When we finally resumed, all the protocols and measures that we had to take were like living in a movie, while filming one. It was shocking. Covid 19 changed our lives for sure.

- Salvador Montenegro (Actor, "Silverio")

"The ghost plan" for the final travel on our last week of the shoot seemed particularly impossible, we had to split into three reduced units, one was the advanced unit and the other 2 were shooting while traveling to Torreón. We were in the middle of the pandemic, every move had to be carefully thought out, but it was wonderful to experience how everyone was pitching in and helping out without leaving it just for the production team to solve, everything ran smoothly. It was impressive to feel the trust and the way we were all in sync with the best intentions. Seeing 250 crew members work with such precision in those harsh conditions speaks of the love that we all felt for this project.

- Alexa Aroesty (Line Producer)

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

James Schamus

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James Schamus is an award-winning screenwriter, producer, director and business executive, and he's been a mainstay of independent filmmaking for over three decades. In 2015, Schamus launched Symbolic Exchange, a New York based film development company focused on supporting diverse, emerging voices. Symbolic's most recent films are Kitty Green's "The Assistant," starring Julia Garner (which was recently nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards), and Andrew Ahn's "Driveways," starring Hong Chau and Brian Dennehy. Schamus' film directorial debut was the adaptation of Philip Roth's "Indignation," starring Logan Lerman, Sarah Gadon and Tracy Letts. It premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and Berlin Film Festival, and it was released by Roadside Attractions.

Previously, Schamus co-founded and served as CEO of Focus Features for twelve years. With him at the helm, Focus Features produced many critically acclaimed and commercially successful films, including "Moonrise Kingdom," "Milk," "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," "The Kids Are Alright," "The Pianist," "Coraline" and "Dallas Buyers Club."

Schamus' long association with Ang Lee resulted in a dozen critically acclaimed films. He produced Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain," which won three Academy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, four BAFTA Awards and the Darryl F. Zanuck Award for Outstanding Producer of Theatrical Motion Pictures. Schamus also received Oscar nominations for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Original Song for his work on Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Schamus and Lee's other collaborations, many of which Schamus wrote, include: "Lust, Caution," "Hulk," "Ride with the Devil," "The Ice Storm," "Sense and Sensibility," "Eat Drink Man Woman," "The Wedding Banquet" and "Pushing Hands." Schamus was awarded the Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival for "The Ice Storm."

Before forming Focus Features, Schamus served as co-president of the independent production company Good Machine, which he co-founded in 1991. He is also a Professor of Professional Practice at Columbia University's School of the Arts, where he teaches film history and theory. He earned his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2003. He is also the author of "Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud: The Moving Word," published by the University of Washington Press.

Monika Revilla

Monika Revilla is a Mexican screenwriter. She holds a BA in Communication from the Ibero-American University (*Universidad Iberoamericana*), an MA in Advertising from the Comillas Pontifical University (*Universidad Pontificia de Comillas*) and an MA in Literary Proficiency from the *Escuela de Letras de Madrid*. She lived in Madrid and Berlin, and she worked in the corporate world before turning to screenwriting.

She began her screenwriting career by writing series for *Canal Once*. "Juana Inés" is the story of the eponymous 17th-century poet, and "Malinche" tells the life story of the conquistador Hernán Cortés' interpreter.

She received the Jóvenes Creadores grant from the Mexican National Fund for Culture and Arts (FONCA) to write "Dance of the Forty-One." The film, in which she also acted as executive producer, is about an underground gay society during the 19th century. It will soon be available on Netflix.

She wrote for two series directed by Manolo Caro: "The House of Flowers," a comedy about a dysfunctional family, and "Someone Has to Die," set in Francoist Spain.

She recently wrote for "**Somos**," a limited Netflix Original series, together with Oscar nominee James Schamus and in collaboration with novelist Fernanda Melchor. The series is based on the true story of the massacre that took place in the town of Allende, Coahuila, in 2011.

Fernanda Melchor

She was born in Veracruz in 1982. She majored in journalism at the University of Veracruz (*Universidad Veracruzana*) and holds a master's degree in Aesthetics and Art from the Autonomous University of Puebla (*Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*) and a post-graduate degree in Political Science from the Rennes Institute of Political Studies (*Institut D'Études Politiques de Rennes*). She's the author of the novels "*Falsa liebre*," "Hurricane

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Season” (which was translated into more than twenty languages) and “*Páradais*,” as well as the book “*Aquí no es Miami*.” She also wrote various literary articles published in magazines such as *Replicante*, *Letras Libres*, *GQ*, *Vice*, *Revista de la Universidad*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *The Paris Review* and *Harper’s*.

She has been a fellow in several FONCA artistic creation stimulus programs and has been a member of the Mexican National Artists Board (*Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte de México*).

In 2013, she was nominated by the literary magazine *La Tempestad* as emerging writer of the year in Mexico’s artistic scene. At the end of 2014, her work was selected to participate in the narrative anthology *México 20*, an initiative showcasing the English-language work of Mexican authors under the age of 40. Her novel “Hurricane Season,” considered by the *New York Times* as the best Mexican novel of 2017, received the 2019 Anna Seghers Prize, the 2019 International Prize for Literature, and the 2018 PEN America Literary Award. It was also nominated for the Booker International Award in 2020.

Sandra Solares

Producer, director and screenwriter, Sandra Solares was responsible for the production of more than 40 feature films since her career began in the late 1980s. Solares participated in successful Mexican projects such as Alfonso Cuarón’s drama *Y tu mamá también* (2001), or the successful dramatic comedy starring Eugenio Derbez and Loreto Peralta *Instructions not Included* (2011). She was also the producer of *Acorazado* (2009), *Querido Carlos* (2011) and *Diablero* (2018), a Netflix original series. As a director, she received the Casa de las Américas award for production in Madrid, Spain, for her 2001 short film *A la otra*, which also won the sixth journal of short film for best fiction short, best director and best editing, among other recognitions. In 2018 he wrote, produced and directed his first fiction feature film, *Ni tuyo, ni mía*, a drama starring Alejandra Barros, Tony Dalton, Prakriti Maduro and José Fors. Sandra has been the executive producer of more than 27 films including *Cristiada* (2010), Mexican gangster (2012), *La dictadura perfecta* (2013), *Helena* (2016), *¡Que viva México!* (2020), and *Somos*. (2021), the new Netflix original series that is a fiction based on the article Anatomy of a massacre written by Ginger Thompson about the massacre that occurred in Allende, Coahuila in 2011.

Mariana Chenillo

She studied film at the *Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica*. She has written and directed three feature films: “Nora’s Will” (2008), her debut feature, winner of several international awards, including seven Ariel Awards (Mexico); “Paradise” (2013), winner of several awards and which was part of the Official Selection of the 11th Morelia International Film Festival (FICM) and the New Directors section of the 61st San Sebastián International Film Festival (Spain); “All That is Invisible,” which will be released in early 2021. Her TV-related experience includes more than 30 episodes for various platforms.

Álvaro Curiel

Álvaro Curiel de Icaza was born in Mexico City into a family of film, literary and musical artists, who have left a considerable mark on Mexican popular culture. He studied at the *Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica*, majoring in film directing. His thesis project *Si un instante* (If an Instant) was shown at film festivals worldwide, winning in Toulouse and was screened at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In 2000, he moved to Buenos Aires to study performing arts.

He began his career as an Assistant Director, working alongside international directors such as Arturo Ripstein, Eric Zonca and Agustí Villaronga.

His debut film “*Acorazado*,” which he wrote and directed, was nominated for an Ariel Award, won the Latin American Film Festival of Catalonia and the Morelia International Film Festival, and ran extensively in international festivals. In 2018, he directed “*Marionette*,” winner of a prize at the Guadalajara International Film Festival. In collaboration with Amat Escalante, he filmed “*Heridas*,” a work of short films against violence. He is currently involved in the post-production of his most recent feature film “*Tú eres mi problema*.”

Since 2006, he has concentrated on TV shows, directing more than 30, including “*Sitiados: México*,” “2091,” “*Los simuladores*” and “*Hasta que te conocí*,” the latter two titles having been nominated for an international Emmy

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Award. His most recent work is “*Somos.*”, written and produced by James Schamus for Netflix. Álvaro Curiel has been teaching at various film schools since 2000.

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