

PAULINA

A non-fiction feature film

by Vicky Funari, Jennifer Maytorena Taylor & Paulina Cruz Suárez
1998 • USA/Mexico/Canada • Spanish with English subtitles

SYNOPSIS

In 1950s rural Mexico, when Paulina was a child, her parents traded her away for land rights. The villagers ostracized her and the town boss raped her, keeping her as his unwilling child bride. At 15, she took control of her destiny and escaped to Mexico City to begin a new life. In the 1990s, Paulina returns to her village to confront her family and her own painful memories, but she encounters a web of intrigue and denial. *PAULINA* interweaves documentary and narrative styles to explore people's radically different perspectives on this courageous woman. *PAULINA* is an exploration of the lasting impact of systemic violence against women and a testament to the power of resilience.



PAULINA had its world premiere in Havana at the Festival of New Latin American Cinema and its U.S. premiere at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival. It had a limited theatrical release in 1999, and was broadcast on the Sundance Channel in 2000. It is available for educational and non-theatrical exhibition through Icarus Films.

PRESS QUOTES

"*PAULINA* was ten years in the making, but its passion and energy are fresh... blending real-life and re-enactment footage with dazzling virtuosity... a favorite at the Sundance Film Festival, it has a magical glow." –*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A remarkable documentary... simultaneously devastating and inspiring... assured, intelligent filmmaking... a testament to what the human spirit can endure and rise above." –*The New York Times*

AWARDS

- Grand Jury Prize and Golden Spire Award for Bay Area Documentary, 1998 San Francisco International Film Festival
- Best Documentary, 1998 San Antonio CineFestival
- Best Documentary, 1998 San Juan Film Festival
- Nominated, IFP "Truer Than Fiction" Spirit Awards, 1999
- Lifetime Television's Vision Award, 1999 Hamptons Film Festival
- Gold Special Jury Award, 1999 WorldFest Houston

SELECTED SCREENINGS

- Festival of New Latin American Cinema, Documentary Competition, Havana, 1997 (*World Premiere*)
- Sundance Film Festival, Documentary Competition, Park City, Utah, 1998 (*North American Premiere*)
- Muestra de Cine Mexicano, Guadalajara, 1998 (*Mexican Premiere*)
- Locarno International Film Festival, International Critics' Week, Locarno, 1998 (*European Premiere*)
- San Antonio Cine Festival, San Antonio, 1998
- Human Rights Watch Film Festival, New York, 1998
- Sao Paulo International Film Festival, Sao Paulo, 1998

KEY CREDITS

Directed by Vicky Funari
Produced by Vicky Funari and Jennifer Maytorena Taylor
Cinematography by Marie-Christine Camus
Original music by Pauline Oliveros
Written by Vicky Funari and Paulina Cruz Suárez with Jennifer Maytorena Taylor
Edited by Vicky Funari and Jennifer Maytorena Taylor

MAJOR FUNDERS

A co-production with the Banff Centre for the Arts
Funded by the U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture, Pacific Pioneer Fund, Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund,
Astraea Lesbian Action Foundation

FORMAT

16mm & digibeta / 88 minutes / Color
Exhibition copies available as digital file, DVD, & 16mm print
Can be previewed via streaming by request
a CineMamás production



FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

Our Process: The working process for *Paulina* was collaborative, involving the producers, Vicky Funari and Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, and Paulina herself. Paulina had a strong and critical voice at all stages of the process, collaborating on the script and weighing in on casting, location scouting and other aspects of the production. During post-production, Paulina travelled to the Banff Center in Canada, where we were editing, to give feedback on the cut and to write and record her final narration. This relationship between filmmakers and subject was at the time unusual in documentary practice, and it went against some of the dominant tenets of documentary filmmaking. We intended to challenge traditional notions of the filmmaker as "auteur" and of the "objectivity" of the documentary genre, while ensuring that Paulina would be in control of her image in the final film. We sought to confront a prevalent pattern in so many documentary and fiction films, in which women, people in developing nations, and those in marginalized communities are represented as "other," "exotic," or "victim." We knew Paulina as a resilient, creative woman, a survivor, and we wanted our film to reflect this.

We also wanted to challenge mainstream, simplistic ideas about Mexico and about the relationship between Mexico and the United States. We made this film from 1989-1998, a decade when the physical frontier between the United States and Mexico was becoming increasingly blurred and when tensions were rising over immigration and economic interdependence. We are mixed-culture filmmakers, and we are women filmmakers. We believe that collective well-being depends on the ability of Mexican and U.S. cultures to bridge cultural and psychological borders. We believe that women in particular need to listen across cultures, identify our commonalities, and communicate our differences. We want to see mass media images that tell real and complex stories, with central characters who are Mexican, female, and fully-drawn. We want media images that foster deep understanding. We knew we'd have to make these images ourselves.

In 20th century U.S. media, images of Latinos were scarce, one-dimensional and often denigrating. In Mexican media, working-class and provincial women had been the central characters of fiction films, but these stories typically came to a tragic end. In both U.S and Mexican media of the era, a Mexican maid, when she was seen in films at all, was usually no more than a passive object in the background of a scene. In this film, Paulina is both subject and shaper of her story.

Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, Producer: *Paulina* explores the ways in which significant social, economic, and human rights issues intersect at every turn in one woman's life. The film provides for critical discussion of deeply political issues that are at once specific and universal. The crushing poverty that is endemic to rural life, a hemisphere-wide caste system based on amounts of European blood in the veins, and the often violent subjugation of girls and women are all crucial aspects of life throughout the postcolonial societies of the Americas, including the United States and Mexico. Time and again, these themes are left unaddressed by media producers and distributors in favor of "hard" news (i.e. guns, drugs, and dictators). With *Paulina*, we attempted to meet the need for films about the lives of women in rural and urban Latin American while focusing on Paulina's inspiring and extraordinary character and life story.

Vicky Funari, Producer/Director: This film grew out of a personal childhood connection. When I was nine and my family was living in Mexico, Paulina came to work for us. Although all the power dynamics that are typically in play between employers and servants must have been part of the scenario, as a child I only perceived love and mutual respect. Paulina lived in our home and temporarily became a second mother to me and a friend to our family. Her daughter Rosita became my playmate; I loved not being the youngest one in the house anymore and taking on the role of big sister. Paulina soon knew everything about me: she cleaned up after me, washed my clothes, found my hidden dens of Twinkies and stolen comic books and dismantled them without telling my parents. But she rarely spoke to us of her own life. As a child, I never noticed her silence. She did give me one potent image from her far-away home village: she told me about a tree in her garden that bore more avocados than her family could eat. It rained avocados, each as fat as two of her fists. I was thrilled, certain that Paulina and her family could get rich from that tree; but she explained that in order to sell avocados you had to have money to rent a truck to get them to the city. Long after my family and I had left Mexico, I could still picture those avocados, rotting into Paulina's distant, imagined native soil.

Eleven years after we'd left, I returned to Mexico, now a young woman, expecting a tender reunion with Paulina. I got a polite, friendly handshake. She asked why my hair was so short, offered to cook me my favorite meal of green enchiladas, and said, "Bring me your laundry, I'll do it for you." But I was no longer a child, and she was not my family's servant. Instead of laundry, we told stories. I told her about my life, and she began to tell me about hers.

When Paulina chose to speak, she opened a door between our worlds. Our commonalities as women drew us together in easy understanding; yet our different experiences of class, race and culture had given us false pictures of each other. Was this defiant, passionate, witty woman the same motherly Paulina who had cared for me when I was a child? In the years since my family had left Mexico, my parents had spoken of her as a victimized woman, a single mother locked with her daughter into a cycle of poverty. I was now facing a courageous soul who had defied the power structures of her village and her family, and who had raised her daughter into

independence and self-respect. My family had missed something. Now I listened, mesmerized. When Paulina joked, “You should make a movie about me,” I thoroughly agreed.

For me this film was a way to explore the silences between us and to replace them with speech and listening; a way to acknowledge the struggle of a respected elder; and a way to challenge oppressive norms. For Paulina it was a chance to share her true self with a world that has so often failed to see her or hear her voice: “I hope for the film to speak of the culture of Mexico and of how the powerful mistreat the weak. I don’t know where this horror comes from. I’d like to make a different world.”

BIOS

Vicky Funari, Producer/Director: Vicky Funari is a documentary filmmaker, editor, and teacher. She produced, directed, and edited *MAQUILÁPOLIS [city of factories]* (2006), a piercing look at globalization through the eyes of Mexican factory workers (co-directed by Sergio De La Torre). She produced, directed, and edited the non-fiction feature *Paulina* (1998), a story of human resilience, about a Mexican woman who redefines and reclaims herself after being trafficked as a child (co-produced with Jennifer Maytorena Taylor). She directed and edited *Live Nude Girls UNITE!* (2000), a fierce, funny account of the first strippers’ union in the US (co-directed by Julia Query). These award-winning, critically acclaimed films have screened in preeminent film festivals, including Sundance, Locarno, Havana, Rotterdam, SXSW, Ambulante, and Tribeca, and have aired on PBS and the Sundance Channel. Funari’s work encompasses a commitment to co-creative and community-oriented processes. She builds multiplatform project elements and collaborative engagement campaigns to keep the work connected, useful, and accessible to the people represented in the work and to maximize its real-world impact. With *MAQUILÁPOLIS* and its Binational Community Engagement Campaign she and her team modeled this approach, partnering with factory workers and grassroots organizations to promote public dialogue and social change. She is a Visiting Senior Lecturer in Visual Studies at Haverford College, where she teaches documentary filmmaking and designs interdisciplinary programming and curriculum.



Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, Producer: Jennifer Maytorena Taylor makes colorful, character-based films about real people with extraordinary stories. Her work has been shown at venues such as the Sundance and Locarno Film Festivals, the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, the New York Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum, and by broadcasters such as PBS, Sundance Channel, and NHK-Japan. Jennifer’s newest film, the documentary short *Visiting Day*, is currently screening in film festivals and on the online channel of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Her long-form film *Daisy and Max* was commissioned by Al Jazeera America for broadcast in the US and around the world. Her previous films include the award-winning documentaries *New Muslim Cool*, *Special Circumstances*, *Paulina*, *Home Front*, *Street Knowledge 2*, *College*, and many short films and co-productions. Jennifer has held fellowships at the Sundance Institute, Banff Centre for the Arts, the Knight Center for Specialized Journalism, and the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, where she earned a Masters Degree in Specialized Journalism as an Annenberg Fellow. She is a recipient of the James D. Phelan Art Award for her body of work, and has won two Emmys as well as multiple festival awards. A former dancer who loves Brazilian pop, honkytonk, comic books, tacos, taco trucks, *Mad* magazine, urban hiking, cooking, modern design, and flat-ground bike riding, Jennifer also works as an Assistant Professor in the Social Documentation Masters program and the Film and Digital Media Department at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She is currently in production on two new films, one about a self-identified “redneck” Muslim hospital chaplain in North Carolina and another about acclaimed Brazilian jazz pianist Eliane Elias.

