UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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United States-Based Latina Producers of Feature Films (1976-Present): The Role of Community, Creativity, and Currency in Synergistic Authorship

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Film and Television

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

United States-Based Latina Producers of Feature Films (1976-Present): The Role of Community, Creativity, and Currency in Synergistic Authorship

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Professor Chon A. Noriega, Chair

Latinas' marginalization within the film industry has been reproduced in the writing of film history as a result of many factors, including (but not limited to) male-centered notions of history and dominant models of authorship that center the director as the principle creative force behind the filmmaking process. Motivated by a commitment to securing Latina filmmakers' place in film history, this study of U.S.-based Latina producers of Latina/o-themed feature films proposes a "synergistic" model of authorship that makes visible creative contributions of authors who do not occupy designated roles such as "director" or (less so) "writer," traditionally associated with authorship. Instead, it acknowledges the way numerous creative, institutional, historical, sociological, and economic forces come together to shape a film.

This dissertation involves a series of case studies that represent various modes of production, from independently produced, self-distributed films to those made and distributed by Hollywood studios. The case studies include: Josey Faz, who was involved with the making of the first three Chicano features during the 1970s; Elizabeth Avellán, who is co-owner of Troublemaker Studios and one of the most successful and prolific producers working on Hollywood films today; the making of *Chasing Papi* (2003) at 20th Century Fox, which involved writer/producer Laura Angélica Simón, director Linda Mendoza, and associate producer Christy Haubegger; and Hollywood star-turned-producer, Salma Hayek, who was a driving force behind the film, *Frida* (2002) and the television series, *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010).

This study investigates the way creative control is conceptualized, as well as dynamics at work in the production culture of Latina filmmakers and the variety of activities involved in the work they do. While there is no "ideal" mode of production that provides "better" opportunities for Latinas to create more "positive" images than others, there are unique advantages and challenges associated with each. Utilizing a feminist, cultural studies approach to the subject, this study mobilizes oral histories, discourse analysis, and to a lesser extent, textual analysis to show Latinas are creative authors who are gaining power to change the way feature films are made while diversifying who it is that gains opportunities to make them.

The dissertation submitted by Mirasol Aurelia Riojas is approved.

John T. Caldwell

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2012

In memory of *Tejana* film pioneer

Josey Faz

(1948 – 2011)

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Diversity Initiative for Graduate Students in the Social Sciences, this work would not have been possible without your generous support.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Writing Latinas Into Film History

In 2002, the critical and commercial success of *Real Women Have Curves* seemed to promise a bright future for Latina-made and -themed features in the United States. In addition to the recognition the director of the film, Patricia Cardoso, received, other Latinas[1] such as María Ripoll (*Tortilla Soup,* 2001) and Fina Torres (*Woman on Top,* 2000) had also begun to garner attention for directing Latina-themed films. Unfortunately, this recent increase in mainstream visibility has not translated into a significant amount of additional work for Latina directors of feature films.[2] In addition, to put this recent "increase" in access to the means of production in perspective, Martha M. Lauzen's "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I will be utilizing several different terms to refer to individuals of Latin American descent. The term "Latina/o" denotes men and women of Latin American descent, both U.S. born and otherwise. I will be exploring the category "Latina" as one used for bracketing this population of women for purposes of identity formation and one used for hiring within the film industry, as it is through such categorization that marginalized populations are often able to gain visibility within the mainstream. See Chon Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); I will also be using the term Chicana/o to refer to individuals of Mexican-American descent. I make clear the distinction between the term Chicana/o and Mexican-American to emphasize the political connotations associated with the former, as it indicates the presence of a politicized self-awareness absent from the latter term. For book-length studies on the Chicano film movement, see Chon Noriega, *Shot in America*; Chon Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Rosa Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Finally, I will be using the term Hispanic to indicate the U.S. government's and the media/advertising industry's attempts to categorize populations and identify markets based on language and pan-ethnic identity, eliding regional and cultural differences among Latino communities.

[2] *Real Women Have Curves (RWHC)*, for example, did well for a small, independent film with a limited release. It enjoyed success on both the festival circuit and among critics, and received a good deal of attention in the mainstream press. It would not have been unreasonable to expect that the filmmakers' careers would thrive and that there would be a significant increase in Latina-themed feature film projects. Ten years later, however, the women behind *RWHC* have found little work in the industry. Josefina López, who wrote the play upon which the movie was based and also co-wrote the script, has written scripts for a couple of short films, while the director, Cardoso has struggled to secure work on additional features. Cardoso was attached to Universal Pictures's *Nappily Ever After* and Disney's *The Jane Plan*, neither of which came to fruition. Eight years after *RWHC* was made, she directed the TV movie, *Lies in Plain Sight* (2010), for *Lifetime*. She recently directed *Meddling Mom,* another TV movie that was made for *Hallmark* and is expected to be released on Mother's Day of 2013. Similarly, Afro-Latina director, Darnell Martin (*I Like It Like That*, 1994) has been the subject of numerous scholarly articles and has received attention in the popular press. She now, however, finds work primarily in the television industry, as do many other Latina filmmakers.

Women on the Top 250 Films of 2011," shows that women constituted only five percent of directors that year.[3] There are no statistics available with regard to the percentage of the directors in Lauzen's study that are Latina, but they clearly account for only a fraction of that five percent.

Although Latinas rarely occupy the roles that earn them recognition according to the auteur model, their relative absence from the director's chair should not be confused with a lack of participation in the creative process. Particularly since the 1990s, Latina filmmakers have increasingly been securing opportunities to make films, many of which are reaching mainstream audiences. They fill a variety of roles both above and below the line, as producers, screenwriters, cinematographers, and in various other aspects of other media industries (television in particular[4]). However, because the cultural capital they claim is significantly diminished compared to directors of feature films, the recognition most Latinas receive for their efforts is minimal. This study aims to facilitate a critical understanding of how Latinas occupy a variety of roles behind the camera, as more than mere workers exchanging labor for wages, but rather as creative film authors who are emerging within the film industry. The following analysis of Latina filmmakers makes visible the contributions of authors who do not occupy designated roles such as "director" or (less so) "writer," traditionally associated with autership, and focuses on the role of the producer because women have gained more access to the means of production through that role than by occupying any other above the line position.[5]

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[3] Martha M. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 250 Films of 2011," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, 2012, accessed May 29, 2012, http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html. (Same study available for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010.)

[4] Darnell Martin, Linda Mendoza, and Rose Troche, for example, have additionally (and in the case of Martin and Mendoza, primarily) had a tremendous amount of success directing in the television industry.

[5] Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling." According to Lauzen's study, twenty-five percent of producers on the top 250 films in 2011 were women, while women represented eighteen percent of executive producers, twenty percent of editors, fourteen percent of writers, and four percent of cinematographers. Statistics show that although their

Motivated by an investment in securing Latinas' place in film history, this study aims to fill a gap in current scholarship to specifically address Latinas involved in the making of feature films in the U.S. Although scholarship that addresses Latinas in film does exist, that scholarship generally focuses upon their contributions as directors of short, experimental, and documentary films, as well as their on-screen representations, for these are the capacities in which they have been most prolific. However, as Chicano film scholar Chon Noriega has noted, it is features "which tend to be the focus of most film scholarship."[6] Consequently, Latina directors fail to receive the level of scholarly recognition associated with feature filmmaking. It is not surprising the level of popular and critical acclaim they receive reflects a similar bias.

In addition to scholars' and audiences' preoccupation with directors, the history of Latina filmmakers involved in the making of feature films threatens to be erased due to a number of other factors. Not only do dominant histories marginalize their experiences upon the basis of both race and gender, but histories that attempt to recover the subaltern histories of people of color and women often exclude their experiences as women and as Latinas, respectively. For example, Rosa Linda Fregoso has documented the way in which Chicana filmmakers have had to work against not only the dominant culture's distortion of the Chicana/o experience, but also the male-centered discourse of Chicanos who dominate Chicana/o film.[7] Similarly, Chicanas/Latinas are rarely included in what Jennifer Bean calls the "urgency of [feminists'] preservation and

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numbers were still significantly disproportionate to men, women were found in higher concentrations as producers than any other key positions on the top 250 films of that year.

[6] Chon Noriega, "Road to Aztlán: Chicanos and Narrative Cinema" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1991), 129.

[7] Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Chicana Film Practices: Confronting the Many-Headed Demon of Oppression," in *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*, ed. Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 171.

recovery agendas,"[8] when it comes to recuperating women's place in film history.[9] U.S.-based Latinas continue to receive only minimal attention from scholars.[10]

In order to bring the work of Latina filmmakers to the fore, it is important to recognize what feminist film scholar Judith Mayne claims is crucial to "reinventing" women's cinema: a discussion of female authorship.[11] This analysis of Latina producers' experiences depends upon expanding dominant notions of authorship that contribute to the relegation of Latinas to the margins of film history in order to account for Latinas' participation in the making of feature films. Instead, it offers a new model, namely, a "synergistic" model that moves away from focusing on the director as auteur, and instead accounts for a multiplicity of factors and

[8] Jennifer Bean, introduction to *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

[9] For examples of the surge in feminist scholarship around women in early/silent cinema, see Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, eds. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Jane Gaines is also the chair of The Women Film Pioneers Project, based at Duke University. There are also several other works on contemporary women filmmakers working in industrial filmmaking and independent film and video production in the United States and around the world. For U.S. examples, see Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women Film and Video Artists (*New York: Routledge, 1998); Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2002); B. Ruby Rich, *Chick FLICKS: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). For world cinema, see Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (London: Wallflower, 2002); Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Women Film Directors: An International Bio-critical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); Barbara Koenig Quart, *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (New York: Praeger Paperback, 1989); Geetha Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[10] In addition to Rosa Linda Fregoso's foundational texts, "Chicana Film Practices: Confronting the Many-Headed Demon of Oppression," and *The Bronze Screen*, which have previously been footnoted, more recent works which do address Latinas in film include: Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Myra Mendible, ed., *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Isabel Molina-Guzmán, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010); While these books do address the representation of Latinas in the media, they focus solely on representation, on-screen (the former studies both men and women, and the latter two are not film-centric but rather, addresses women in film and a variety of other media).

[11] Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). Mayne stresses the patriarchal implications of the term authorship and observes that female authorship has been addressed only minimally in feminist film studies. Chapter Three of Mayne's book, which is entitled "Female Authorship Reconsidered," serves as a point of departure for my study, in this regard.

influences that converge for the making of feature films. Christina Lane, whose book-length study, *Feminist Hollywood: From* Born in Flames *to* Point Break,[12] stresses the importance of incorporating institutional and industrial analysis to any investigation of the auteur; I am also interested in filmmaking as a social and material act. However, this study differs from Lane's (as well as Mayne's and many others')[13] in that it departs from the auteurist framework used to study women directors in Hollywood. The irony of many calls for alternative models of authorship is, in fact, that most scholars who make such calls do maintain the director at the center of their work.[14] This study focuses, instead, on the role of the producer in the filmmaking process, not as an individual auteur, but as a key figure in creating the synergy necessary for the making of feature films.

Throughout the course of this study, I will be using a series of four case studies to illuminate the ways in which Latina producers are finding their ways behind the camera, and what they are doing once they find themselves there. The case studies include: Josey Faz, who was involved with the making of the first three Chicano feature films during the 1970s; Elizabeth Avellán, a co-owner of Troublemaker Studios, who is one of the most successful and prolific producers working on Hollywood films, today; the making of *Chasing Papi* (2003), marketed as

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[12] Christina Lane, *Feminist Hollywood: From* Born in Flames *to* Point Break (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

[13] It is important to note that while Mayne attributes theorists' lack of attention to female authorship to fears of essentializing women, overvaluing the role of the director, and overestimating the connection between the female author's "personhood" and her texts, her interest in finding the lesbian signature of director Dorothy Arzner, on her films, does lead her to privilege the director in ways that my work aims to avoid. Mayne's interest is illustrated in Chapter Four of *Woman at the Keyhole*, "Mistress of Discrepancy," and in her book, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[14] Additional titles that follow in this vein include (but are not limited to) books such as the aforementioned works by Judith Mayne (*The Woman at the Keyhole* and *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*); Geetha Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006); Annette Kuhn, ed., *Queen of the 'B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* (New York: Praeger Paperback, 1995).

"the first major studio comedy to reflect the Hispanic cultural experience in America";[15] and Hollywood star-turned-producer, Salma Hayek, who was a driving force behind the hugely successful film, *Frida* (2002) and television series, *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010). These case studies represent several different modes of production, including independently produced, self-distributed films, as well as those made and distributed by Hollywood studios. In some cases, filmmakers have made attempts to break into the Hollywood industry, while others have operated entirely outside of that system. I will be conducting analyses of the dynamics at work in the production cultures of Latina filmmakers, both within the context of films intended for regional audiences as well as those intended for the international market.

As I will show, there is no "ideal" mode of production that provides Latinas "better" opportunities to provide more "positive" images than others. In fact, there are both pros and cons to each, which afford particular advantages and represent unique challenges with which the filmmakers must contend. In each case, I will be exploring the idea of what constitutes creative control as well as the manner in which Latina filmmakers have been able to gain (and in some cases, have not gained) creative control behind the scenes of feature films.

This analysis highlights some of the most prominent "points of entry" for Latinas interested in making feature films, meaning the avenues by which they gain access to the means of production: romantic partnerships, the genre of Latina-themed romantic comedies, movies made for cable television, and actors who convert their star power into producing power. It investigates the strategic alliances Latinas are building and the survival strategies they are utilizing as they draw upon both formal and informal social structures for support in order to

[15] Bernadette Marie Calafell and Shane T. Moreman's unpublished article, "*Chasing Papi,* Chasing Authenticity: Creating the 'Latino' Film," as quoted in "Roundtable Issue: Conversations about Race and Ethnicity in Advertising," *Advertising and Society Review* 6.2 (2005), accessed May 15, 2007, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v006/6.2roundtable.html.

navigate a white, male-dominated industry; it simultaneously illustrates the importance of community, creativity, and the use of multiple types of currencies (both tangible and intangible) in the development of synergistic authorship, which is often orchestrated by producers.

Reframing Authorship: Making Room for Latinas (and "Others") in Film

As briefly mentioned, in order to make visible instances of Latina expression in film, it is necessary to shift the discussion of film authorship away from the director, alone, and towards a model of authorship that accounts for a variety of influences that affect what finally ends up on the screen. For the problem of Latinas' underrepresentation in the workforce and film history is compounded by scholars', critics', and audiences' preoccupation with film directors, as well as by the way film authorship is conceptualized. As Thomas Schatz explains, "The dominant critical paradigm regarding film authorship is of course the auteur theory, which posits the director as the film's principal (if not sole) author."[16] The synergistic model of authorship offered in this study challenges such notions of authorship and accounts for the collaborative nature of filmmaking, as well as numerous industrial, economic, historical, and sociological forces that influence film content.

Because large scale projects such as feature films require so many skills, talents, and resources, and they are products comprised of various artistic creations (screenplays, sets, costumes, performances, etc.), to attribute the success of the entire film to the exceptional tools, skills, or ideas of a particular individual, or to evaluate such talents as the "most" consequential or the "least," is an insufficient way to determine authorship. It is the way in which the contributions come together as a whole, which makes films "work." Producers are key figures

[16] Thomas Schatz, "Film Industry Studies and Hollywood History," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Massachusetts and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 49.

who coordinate all the elements necessary to bring the picture together, as a whole, as they coordinate and manage the resources and talent of numerous people in order to complete a film.

It should be noted that although I prioritize the concerns of U.S.-based Latina filmmakers both within the academy and within filmmaking communities, it is not my intent to document some definitive history that foregrounds Latina producers as individual auteurs. As Michele Hilmes rightly asserts:

> in some ways the nomination of the individual *auteur* figure works against the complexity and interdependence of a media industries approach, and thus efforts to isolate the contributions of a particular figure must always fundamentally distort the realities of media authorship.[17]

My aim is to shift the discussion of authorship away from individual auteurs, towards a synergistic model that acknowledges the way that numerous creative, institutional, historical, sociological, and economic forces shape a film. As I will show, the synergistic authorship to which Latina filmmakers contribute is inflected by the networks and communities to which they belong. The collective signatures that they leave on the films are a result of a complex process of negotiations among directors, producers, writers, and in some cases, studios (among others), all of which are subject to a multiplicity of influences. Together, these factors guide filmmakers in their decision-making processes, as well as the investments they have in leaving a particular signature on their films.

Creative Collaboration on the "Whole" Picture (More or Less)

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[17] Michelle Hilmes, "Nailing Mercury: The Problem of Media Industry Historiography," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Massachusetts and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 26.

Although there is much skill, talent, and in many instances, creativity involved in the work that film producers do, there is a common misconception about exactly what is involved in the work of "producing." Matthew Bernstein's essay, "The Producer as Auteur," shows that when considered according to the auteur theory, which informs so much of film history, producers have historically embodied "that impersonality, those barriers, that money-oriented environment,"[18] which has the reputation for hampering the director's/auteur's vision. Whether discussing early producers as administrators, writers/directors who also took on the added responsibilities of producing to maintain creative control of their work, or actors who owned production companies, Bernstein shows that other than Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System*, which makes a strong case for producers as auteurs during the relatively short-lived studio era of the1930s and 1940s, it is rare that producers are considered auteurs who have the creative capabilities necessary to shape an entire film. Furthermore, in the rare case a producer is given that distinction, it is not associated with their role as producer, per se. Bernstein shows that producers have historically been understood as individuals without "artistry or vision to express. Producers are managers, supervisors; they are all about the bottom line."[19]

This study supports that producers do much more than simply supervise in the interest of the bottom line. Not only do producers deal with financial resources, their work requires they often be creative in the ways that they handle money. Not only are producers creative with their resources (financial and otherwise), but in their dealings with people. They do more than just recognize and nurture creativity in others. They utilize and develop their own creative visions in the service of these goals. Many producers, in fact, have creative talents that are more

[18] Matthew Bernstein, "The Producer as Auteur," in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 180.

[19] Ibid.

traditionally understood as such (meaning many have the ability to draw, write, or pick up a film camera, for example) and they regularly contribute their creative ideas about how to solve problems that can arise in a variety of aspects of film production. Most importantly, producers adapt to contribute their creative skills to the films on which they work, whenever and wherever they are needed.

Patrick Hogan's three "components of creation" that apply to filmmaking, writing, or any other creative process, are particularly useful in this study's consideration of the place of creativity in synergistic authorship. Hogan defines these three stages of creativity as: 1) coming up with initial guiding structures, 2) developing those structures, and 3) selecting from the possibilities that are presented in stages one and two.[20] Hogan's cognitive approach to the creative process of filmmaking reveals that creativity can occur in any of these three stages. While the director is generally most influential in the second stage of creation, numerous people are involved throughout the entire process. Hogan claims that while it is likely that the director is the "most consequential" auteur in any film, "in the majority of films, the director will not be the only auteur."[21]

In his discussion of the very subjective process of editing, Chicano filmmaker Robert Rodriguez (whose ex-wife/producing partner, Elizabeth Avellán, is the subject of Chapter Three of this study) illustrates the point perfectly: "If someone else is telling you to cut something down, you end up with something that's not really all yours, and not really all theirs."[22] According to Rodriguez, neither the director nor the editor, in this case, can truly claim

[20] Patrick Colm Hogan, "Auteurs and their Brains: Cognition and Creativity in the Cinema," in *Visual Authorship: Creativity and Intentionality in Media,* ed. Torben Grodal, Bente Larsen, and Iben Thorving Laursen (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 69.

[21] Ibid., 72.

[22] Peter Biskind, "'Four' x Four," *Premiere*, November 1995, 77-78.

authorship. It is not only being able to envision the film, but also being able to execute all the necessary tasks that ultimately bring an idea to life that makes the film what it is, as a whole. It is more than just the "creative vision" of the director that shapes the film. The best of ideas, if not executed properly, can result in the worst of films.

In the best possible circumstance, a director and editor, for example, will collaborate on a particular cut of a film, according to an agreed upon "vision." While it is most desirable for all filmmakers to engage in a collaborative process, the term "collaboration" itself implies intent to work together towards a single goal/product. As I will show, while collaboration is certainly an important part of the filmmaking process, the degree to which filmmakers engage in a truly collaborative process varies widely. Filmmakers' understandings of the goals of the film, as well as their own investments in their own creative contributions are not always in concert with each other.

In terms of attempting to maintain a consistent creative vision throughout the duration of the filmmaking process, producers are key to communicating such a vision to all the filmmakers involved in the project. While the creative vision can often originate with the director, it is important to note that, in fact, the vision can originate in many places (with writers, producers, or studios, for example). It can also be a combination of many individuals' visions. Wherever the creative vision originates, producers are responsible for providing options and coordinating resources to execute what filmmakers hope is one agreed-upon vision, while maintaining a complete picture of the film as a whole. As former Fox Family Films President, Christopher Meledandri has noted, producers are more than just businessmen and women. He says being a producer "also takes a firm grasp of storytelling… a talent for working with people under the most pressured circumstances and an ability to maintain a very clear overview of the film at all

times, no matter how grand a momentary crisis the movie is in."[23] Producers are key to assuring that the other creative individuals responsible for executing the "vision" understand and work towards the same goals. For this reason, it is imperative to investigate the circumstances surrounding every individual production when attempting to determine authorship of any particular film. There are innumerable opportunities for a variety of individuals to impose their own creative visions on numerous aspects of a feature film.

In his book-length study, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood,* George F. Custen highlights the possibilities for producers to have creative input in the filmmaking process as he posits the producer's role as that of an author. He makes this claim not in the individual sense of the word "author," but rather by emphasizing the producer as part of a collaborative process, working within a specific set of circumstances and institutional parameters. He claims the producer's power resides "in how, out of his *imagination* he fashions a system of production that can make a shared thing out of something that has been bent to his will."[24]

Custen's argument that the producer has more potential to exercise control over a production than, for example, the director or the screenwriter is useful for this study in that it illustrates that depending on the production, the producer can, in fact, have a profound effect on the creative direction that a film takes. The importance he places on potential, as well as the negotiation process, is particularly relevant to my discussion of synergistic authorship. For not every producer can be assumed to have complete mastery over the system. Not all producers share equal amounts of power, for example, even when they hold identical titles. The

[23] Linda Lee, "A Movie Producer's Own Cinderella Story," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1998, D5.

[24] George F. Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 5. Emphasis in original.

negotiations that take place between directors, producers, writers, and sometimes studios, can also have varying results. What is clear, however, is that there is potential for producers to impact a production to such an extent that they can, in many cases, make significant claims to synergistic authorship as they attempt to align all the right pieces of a film production, at just the right time, in order to make the best film possible.

Producing Titles: Blurring the Boundaries

To complicate the matter of investigating the role of creativity in synergistic authorship even further, filmmakers (such as Rodriguez, cited above) often straddle numerous roles as their creative interests and their talents are not limited to the activities associated with just one title. In fact, there are a variety of ways in which the perceived divisions between different production capacities are commonly misunderstood, and the boundaries between them can be quite permeable. This is especially true within the context of independent productions where resources are limited and the crew may even be unfamiliar with the specific duties attached to their particular positions. It can also, however, hold true in Hollywood productions and, in fact, in some cases when attempts are made to strictly uphold the division of labor, the results can be less than desirable.

For producers, whose activities are so often assumed to be confined to the financial concerns of the filmmaking process, this blurring of boundaries between roles is particularly significant. For as this study will show, producers are most effective and efficient when familiar with the numerous "creative" aspects of making a film, which enables them to facilitate creative collaboration and provide potential solutions to problems for the other filmmakers with whom they work. For these reasons, many filmmakers resist the labels of "producer," or "director," for

example, and prefer terms such as "filmmaker" or "creator," which encompass a wider range of activities and better reflect the flexibility with which they must approach their work.[25]

In addition to deconstructing artificial boundaries between production capacities, which often confuse the understanding of the filmmaking process, it is also the aim of this project to clarify some misconceptions about how some of those boundaries are commonly understood. Specifically, it is my goal to clarify the general understanding of what duties a producer is expected to perform. Titles such as Producer, Assistant Producer, Associate Producer, Executive Producer, Line Producer, and Creative Producer, for example, are both distinct and slippery and communicate a variety of things about the nature of what each individual contributes to a film. Is creativity the domain of the creative producer alone, and thus their distinguished title of "creative" producer? Is the "executive producer" the producer with the most power, as the title would suggest? Is it the producer with the most money? Are all producers "executives," money men and women, administrators, business people who sit behind desks while artists create the films from which they profit? The word, "producer," suggests the position is a generative one, but exactly what a producer generates – whether it be money, contacts, ideas, or something else unknown to audiences – in order to get a film from the page to the screen, is not nearly as clear.

Many filmmaking titles, including that of Producer, in fact, can be extremely misleading. Take, for example, the title of "Assistant Director" (AD). If directors are so often considered the

[25] See, for example: David Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, July 10, 2009; Rana Joy Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Los Angeles, California, September 28, 2011. Both Peña and Glickman, who were interviewed for this project, self-identify as "filmmakers," rather than as a cinematographer or producer, despite each title dominating their respective credits. Peña, for example, explains that he does "a little bit of everything," and so he feels it is the most appropriate word to describe what he does. Glickman says that although she is happy to be called a "producer," she finds the word "confusing" because of the multiple interpretations the term carries. "Filmmaker," therefore, is the only word she has found that has "resonated" with her. Elizabeth Avellán also notes that because of the various roles Rodriguez fills on his films, she feels he is much more than a writer/director, and that the term "creator" is most appropriate to describe him (Elizabeth Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas, November 16, 2011).

most influential personalities responsible for the look of a finished film, it would follow that assistant directors might deserve some consideration for their creative contributions. ADs are, according to the Directors Guild of America (DGA), "the Director's right hand." They are "responsible for the assembly of all the elements needed for filming and for the daily operation of the shooting set. Their objective is to provide the Director with everything he or she needs to put his or her vision on film."[26]

ADs must understand all aspects of the filmmaking process in order to solve what filmmaker Rana Joy Glickman refers to as the "perpetual Rubik's cube" of daily operations, and they have a tremendous impact on the film's budget.[27] To be more specific with regard to the actual duties associated with the position, the Director' Guild of America (DGA) explains them as:

> supervisory, organizational, administrative - and multifarious. Working within the structure that is governed by budgets, union and guild contracts, industry custom, and so on, they make schedules, attend to the cast, direct extras, oversee the crew as each shot is prepared, create detailed reports of each day's events, among may other things, and are looked to by cast and crew to solve the many problems that continually arise.[28]

The title of Assistant Director is extremely difficult to secure and is one that is highly coveted and respected. ADs are not, however, directors in training, as the title might suggest, and few go on to become directors. The position of AD is, in fact, extremely important, in and of its own right, and although it falls under the protection of the DGA, it is actually a very "producer-

[26] "DGA Assistant Director's Training Program," accessed November 10, 2011, http://www.dgatrainingprogram.org/index.php?mnu=2.

[27] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[28] "DGA Assistant Director's Training Program."

friendly" position.[29] ADs are yet another example of unsung heroes in the world of feature filmmaking, heavily involved with activities associated with "producing."

One of the least disputed understandings of the function of the producer, however, is the understanding of what the singular word, "Producer," (also known as the Creative Producer) indicates. The Producer's Guild of America (PGA) explains that the word, "Producer," also known as the "Produced by" credit, is:

> given to the person(s) most completely responsible for a film's production… the "Produced by" would have significant decision-making authority over a majority of the producing functions across the four phases of a motion picture's production. Those phases are: Development; Pre-Production; Production; and Post-Production and Marketing.[30]

Glickman likens the process of producing (in the singular sense of the word) to both parenting and to conducting a symphony, explaining that when "producer" is attached to someone's name, it implies full immersion in the project.[31] There are, however, exceptions to this rule, for as Glickman notes, on rare occasions, individuals might "buy" or be "given" credits for a variety of reasons. In some cases, an individual might be given an inflated title in exchange for the individual to simply "go away." In other instances, individuals may not receive the credit/title

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[29] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas. Also note that the Director's Guild, in fact, has a "Directors Guild - Producers Training Plan" in place, which the DGA explains, does not train participants to be producers, but rather is intended to provide training specific to the job of assistant directors. See "Directors Guild – Producers Training Plan: Assistant Directors Training Plan," accessed October 14, 2001, http://www.trainingplan.org/index.html. Furthermore, the site explains the program "emphasizes administrative, managerial and interpersonal skills. Although some of our graduates have become Producers and/or Directors, an Assistant Director is not a junior director or director-in-training." See "Directors Guild - Producers Training Plan: Frequently Asked Questions," accessed October 14, 2011, http://www.trainingplan.org/faq.html. The language makes clear that while an AD in neither assumed to be training to be a director or a producer, there is, in fact a stronger connection between ADs and producers, considering the title of the duties of the position and the fact that the program is titled, "Directors Guild – Producers Training Plan."

[30] "Code of Credits – Theatrical Motion Pictures: Theatrical Motion Pictures – Primary Credit: PRODUCED BY,'" Producers Guild of America, accessed October 14, 2011, http://www.producersguild.org/?page=coc_tmp.

[31] Rana Joy Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Los Angeles, California, October 7, 2011.

that accurately reflects the pivotal role they played on a film, due to logistic and financial concerns, for example.[32] Simply put, titles do not necessarily reflect the actual duties performed by the individuals who hold them. It is important to investigate the production of each particular film to understand the role that each individual played in the making of that film. As Glickman explains the role, however, a producer is "the creative mother… or father" of a film. This study will show that the work of producers has the potential to be creative on a variety of levels. A producer's understanding of his/her director's creative vision as well as his/her own creative strategies as to how to best mobilize the resources and talents in service of that vision are key to the success of any film.

Documenting What Falls Between

Because this study engages a subject not apprehendable by conventional scholarly methods, it involves a synthesis of several different approaches. First and foremost, it opens a dialogue about Latina filmmakers and issues of authorship by way of a feminist path, using feminism as a methodology that interrogates interlocking systems such as race, class, and gender, to validate Latinas' stories as an integral part of film history. Taking a cultural studies approach to investigating my subject, I examine how Latinas acquire training, skills, and power in a variety of different media industries they have increasingly utilized to make feature films. This

[32] Glickman uses the example of the film *Fun* (1994), for which she received credit as an executive producer, to illustrate the point. She explains that although she committed four years to the project as a full-fledged producer, financial constraints required that she and the other "full" producer on the project accept the inaccurate title of "Executive Producer," instead. The film had been funded by Canadian monies and governed by Canadian guidelines, and because neither Glickman nor the other producer held Canadian passports, they were forced to defer their producing credits to the Canadian-born director, in order to receive payment due. Glickman further explains that the shift in power complicated the distribution of the film as the financial responsibility and key business decisions regarding the film no longer fell on her shoulders. She explains that the situation has become much more complicated since the making of this film as filmmakers are now "chasing tax credits all across the United States and the globe, for that matter." Something as simple as citizenship can dictate a title and the handling of a film production and its distribution.

study involves breaking down boundaries of several different kinds, including those between film and other entertainment media, those perceived between different production capacities, between ethnic identities, personal and professional life, and even between national cinemas. I explore the personal, professional, political, and educational backgrounds that have led Latinas to pursue filmmaking careers, as well as the diverse range of communities to which these Latinas belong. These communities include both formal and informal social structures based upon friendships and romantic partnerships, production capacities and professional associations, and ethnic and national/transnational identity. I investigate how these different communities have shaped Latinas' investments in contributing to images of Latinas in feature films, and how they have both facilitated and hindered Latinas' participation in their making.

While this study does involve a small number of close readings of film texts, which evidence traces of the social, creative, and labor practices that take place among Latinas working behind the scenes,[33] it is important to note that this study does not focus on textual analysis of the images that Latina filmmakers create. It is an exploration of the production cultures of Latina filmmakers and explores how they negotiate with others and with each other to make any number of decisions that influence the content of their films.

Due to the relative lack of critical and scholarly attention and press coverage on Latina filmmakers, critical oral histories are vital to this project. I place these oral histories at the center of three of the four case studies of Latina producers performed in this study (Josey Faz, Elizabeth

[33] In several of the case studies that follow, I discuss films made by Latina filmmakers, which function as allegories for the conditions under which they were made. For a full discussion of the function of allegory within cinema, see David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989). As James notes, filmmaking involves social processes, and the material conditions that accompany the making of a film are inscribed on films, themselves. That inscription, in turn, is the product of a particular historical moment. Furthermore, he explains that the social process of filmmaking "inserts people into specific positions in the industries, social relationships, and discourses of film production, and thereby into society at large" (p. 6), which proves to be significant to this study.

Avellán, and the producers involved with *Chasing Papi*, Laura Angélica Simón and Christy Haubegger). I use these studies as a platform from which to discuss salient issues that affect Latina producers' career opportunities and experiences. Of course, these oral histories cannot be considered as transparent accounts of what "actually happened" with regard to the production of any particular film, the interactions among the production teams, or the filmmakers' own career trajectories. The filmmakers' personal biases and investments in portraying particular versions of their own histories (and those of their texts) must be recognized. As Alessandro Portelli notes, "Oral narrators are aware of [the] written destination [of their interviews], and bear it in mind as they shape their performance."[34] In addition, the unreliable nature of memory must be taken into account. I have, therefore, interviewed multiple collaborators who worked on the same project (including non-Latina cast and crew) each time I have utilized an interview to advance an argument.

In addition, I have cross-checked the information I obtained with that collected from trade journals and the popular press.[35] I have also used the popular, alternative, and Hispanic press in my analysis of press discourse, not only to examine the role that it plays in shaping the public's interest in and recognition of particular films and filmmakers, but also the way in which discussions of Latina-themed/-made bicultural texts vary. As Chon Noriega explains in his essay,

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[34] Alessandro Portelli, *Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 5.

[35] My study is similar to Christina Lane's study, *Feminist Hollywood: From* Born in Flames *to* Point Break, which makes use of oral histories in combination with press accounts, secondary sources, and textual analysis, to conduct case studies of the careers of six women directors in Hollywood. Lane notes that her use of primary interviews is an "attempt to locate the ways in which [women directors in Hollywood's] material, financial, and creative control (including their own sense of what kind of meanings they can produce) appear to change (or not) as they enter commercial film production." She uses biographical information obtained from secondary sources, in combination with the interviews she performed and textual analysis of the films these women have directed to explore each director as a "producer of meaning…not only as an individual… but also a discursive figure who continually mediates and is mediated by her films, her publicity, and her own public articulations" (p. 47).

"Chicano Cinema and the Horizon of Expectations: A Discursive Analysis of Film Reviews in the Mainstream, Alternative, and Hispanic Press, 1987-1988," an analysis of "the aesthetic discourse of film reviews, interviews and feature articles" exposes the way that a film "reveals itself as a multiple text, since each publication offers a different interpretation, one that either reflects, anticipates or attempts to influence the expectations of its readership."[36] Discourse analysis is particularly important to Chapter Five of this study, which is the fourth and final case study of my project. It addresses one of the most significant points of entry to the industry for Latina producers of feature films: stardom. This chapter examines the phenomenon of stars-turned-producers and uses the example of Salma Hayek, one of the most visible Latina celebrities who has successfully mobilized her star power to her advantage as a film and television producer, to illustrate the difficulty of analyzing the ways in which their power functions. Furthermore, Hayek's case illustrates contradictions inherent in Latinas' use of star power, so dependent upon racialized images of sexuality and femininity, to attain the producing power so vital to subverting the very images that have enabled their careers.

Hayek's case illustrates what scholar Mary Beltrán has noted with regard to representations of Latinas/os since the "Latin Wave" of the late 1990s: although Latina/o actors have increasingly gained opportunities in U.S. entertainment media, "one dimensional images" continue to permeate the media landscape and "hints of contradictions and marginalization" persist in the discourse around Latina/o stars who "crossover" into the mainstream.[37] Similar to the Latina/o stars Beltrán describes, Latina filmmakers' experiences also reflect contradictions

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[36] Chon Noriega, "Chicano Cinema and the Horizon of Expectations: A Discursive Analysis of Film Reviews in the Mainstream, Alternative, and Hispanic Press, 1987-1988," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* vol. 19, no. 2 (Fall 1988-1990): 2.

[37] Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meaning of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.

and evidence the persistence of marginalization within filmmaking communities, both independent and within the industrial context.

Conclusion

After more than 100 years of overwhelmingly being depicted by a white, male-dominated industry as clichéd, stereotypical, one-dimensional characters, Latina filmmakers are increasingly securing opportunities to participate in the creation of their own images.[38] While certainly not all Latina filmmakers concern themselves primarily with the representation of race or gender, this study focuses on those who do attend to such representations because of their ability to influence the way people view Latinas/os and the way Latinas/os view themselves. Ultimately, they have a tremendous effect on the opportunities Latinas/os have to tell stories, Latina/o-themed and otherwise. By examining a wide range of films and filmmakers who work in a variety of different environments, from those entirely outside of the Hollywood system to those located squarely within it, this study provides an excellent opportunity to consider who exercises creative control over these new images of Latinas and under what circumstances they are able to do so.

Director Donna Deitch believes the relative success women find as producers is due to the fact that, "producers don't really run the show. Producers are not executors of a vision."[39]

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[38] For scholarship that addresses the history of representation of Latinas/os in the U.S., see: Clara E. Rodríguez, ed., *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997); Arthur G. Pettit, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980); Chalres Ramírez-Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Gary D. Keller, *Hispanics and United States Film: An Overview and Handbook* (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Review Press, 1994).

[39] Melissa Silverstein, "Interview with Donna Deitch, Director of Desert Hearts," *Huffington Post*, July 9, 2008, accessed November 7, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/melissa-silverstein/interview-with-donna-deit_b_111723.html.

Deitch's statement illustrates that a concern with the "visionary" filmmaker, which echoes scholars' preoccupation with the auteur, also reverberates among some filmmakers themselves. Latina director/producer/writer Patricia Riggen notes, in reference to her decision to produce the critically acclaimed film, *La Misma Luna*/Under the Same Moon (2007), that being a producer was key to her maintaining creative control over the film, which she also directed. Initially, she explains, she understood her role as "a director for hire."[40] The writer, Ligiah Villalobos, approached her with the screenplay and together they worked on the script for about a year. Riggen explains that they did have an opportunity to make the film with a studio, but once she began to work with them, she felt she "was losing creative control and the decisions being made were wrong and it wasn't going to be a good movie." Instead, Riggen says, she raised the money for the film on her own in order to maintain creative control.[41] She explains: "I can honestly say that every single final decision in the movie was made by me as director and producer."[42]

While in Riggen's case, she feels her role as the director/producer enabled her to maintain complete creative control, as I will show (with the case of *Chasing Papi*), there are certainly instances in which securing a producer's title does not reproduce this director's experience. What Riggen's case illustrates, however, is that the "creative vision" – which Dietch says producers do not execute – can be impeded by producers and studios not sharing the director's vision. It follows that a producer can, in fact, also facilitate the creative vision and thus have a great impact on that vision, which finally is evidenced on the screen.

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[40] Melissa Silverstein, "Interview with Patricia Riggen, director of La Misma Luna," *Women and Hollywood*, March 19, 2008, accessed June 1, 2012, http://womenandhollywood.com/2008/03/19/interview-with-patricia-riggen-director-of-la-misma-luna/.

[41] Ibid.

[42] "Patricia Riggen: Love and Politics Under the Same Moon," interview by James van Maanen, September 7, 2007, GreenCine, accessed June 1, 2012, http://www.greencine.com/central/patriciariggen.

As Johannes Riis has noted, "film art is the result of more than one kind of artistic contribution."[43] Given that it is notoriously difficult to attribute the source of particular creative ideas to individual people on large productions that take place over many years, to rule out the producer's role as one that is not creative is not only to do producers a great disservice, but to misunderstand the filmmaking process, altogether. Producers face the difficulty of rallying diverse talents and resources around a single creative vision, and the creativity involved in that process warrants the recognition of producers as authors.

The theory of synergistic authorship I propose does attempt to determine filmmakers' creative intent, and whether or not what they envision makes it to the screen. Focusing instead on the way that multiple people and factors influence the way that the original intent changes to become the image that makes its way to the screen, this study addresses theoretical issues related to the way that creative control is conceptualized, as well more materialist concerns such as the legal and economic issues associated with assigning particular credits to particular individuals and/or authorship to particular roles. It acknowledges the importance of collaboration, but also recognizes collaboration is only one way in which a multiplicity of voices come together in a feature film. For as costume designer Julie Weiss has noted, the word "collaboration" has been overused in describing the process of filmmaking. She says, "There's this romance of collaboration. But what it really is, is this -- these sparks that come together."[44] Like this study, Weiss places importance on the way multiple influences converge for the making of feature films.

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[43] Johannes Riis, "Can Involuntary Contributions Be Authored?: A Note on the Actor's Art," in *Visual Authorship: Creativity and Intentionality in Media*, ed. Torben Grodal, Bente Larsen, and Iben Thorving Laursen (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 100.

[44] *The Legacy Series: Julie Weiss – Costume Designer*, directed by Ilene Kahn Power (Los Angeles, CA: Women in Film Foundation, expected release 2013). Weiss is an accomplished costume designer who has worked on numerous popular Hollywood films. Most significant to this study, she was the costume designer for *Frida* (Julie Taymor, 2002), which was produced by Salma Hayek.

Chapter Two

Josey Faz: Traces of a *Tejana* in Chicana/o Film History

The following case study of Chicana filmmaker Josey Faz highlights romantic partnerships as a significant point of entry for Latinas in the world of feature filmmaking. Faz is one of a number of U.S.-based Latinas who have been part of romantic couples with men who are filmmakers, while also working with them on a professional level, as part of a filmmaking team. The tendency in these partnerships is for the women to receive much less credit for the work that they do as producers, writers, editors, and cinematographers of the feature-length films on which they work than their male partners, the directors of the film, as was the case with Faz.[1]

Faz was the romantic partner/wife[2] of Chicano filmmaker Efraín Gutiérrez during the 1970s when he and his filmmaking teams made the first three Chicano feature films, *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!/¡Por Favor, No Me Entierren Vivo!* (1976), *Chicano Love is Forever/Amor Chicano es Para Siempre* (1978), and *Run, Junkie, Run/ Run, Tecato, Run* (1979). These films are representative of both the resourcefulness and community-oriented nature of the first wave of Chicano filmmaking practice. However, they have been fairly inaccessible since their original release and the films have remained in relative obscurity compared to many others

[1] Esperanza Vázquez, who directed *Agueda Martinez: Our People, Our Country* (1977), and edited *Only Once in a Lifetime* (1979), is one example of a Latina who worked with her husband, filmmaker Moctesum Esparza, on several early Chicano films. Elizabeth Avellán, who works with her now ex-husband Robert Rodriguez is another example, who will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter. This trend is at play, in fact, not only with Latina filmmakers, but women filmmakers, more generally speaking. For example, screenwriter/producer Anna Thomas (who is of German/Polish decent) has collaborated with her Chicano husband, Gregory Nava, on numerous projects including the critically acclaimed films, *El Norte* (1983) and *Mi Familia* (1995). In addition, as Jocelyne Denault notes in her essay, "Women Filmmakers in Quebec," in Canada, during the 1970s, when women began making their way into feature films, many of them did so through independent productions but remained "hidden behind a male partner (often their husband or lover) whom they supported, learning on the job. The credits of films from that period often mention the name of a woman who played an ancillary role as 'special collaborator' or by assisting with the direction, camera work, or editing." In *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul (New York: Routledge, 2003), 378.

[2] Although the couple never married, they did live together for some time and Faz was alternately referred to as Gutiérrez's girlfriend and his wife in the popular press.

made by the Chicano filmmakers who followed.[3] As Noriega notes, the films had been considered lost for many years. The place of these early Chicano features in Chicana/o film history is only now being restored more than thirty years after they were made. With regard to the dearth of documentation and examination of these historic films, Noriega explains, "apart from a handful of articles, interviews, and reviews about Gutiérrez in *Caracol*, a Chicano arts magazine in San Antonio in the 1970s, scholars had neither texts nor contextual evidence, and so they remained silent."[4]

Gutiérrez's papers and first three features are now part of institutionalized archives and there has been renewed interest in his work, both past and present.[5] He remains, however, only minimally recognized by film scholars and the press. Furthermore, the youngest of Gutiérrez and Faz's daughters, Mona Lisa Faz, noted in a response to a 2004 *San Antonio Current* article covering the recent increase in interest around Gutiérrez and his work, that her mother's role in the production of these historic Chicano films continues to be overlooked. She says about Faz:

> She contributed greatly to the birth, production, and totality of the first three films. If you have seen the first film you would recognize her as the leading lady in *Please Don't Bury Me Alive*. If you had researched the producers, writers, and actors for all of the films you would have seen her name, like Efrain's, everywhere.[6]

Faz has been formally credited as an actor in *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, for sound and acting in *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre*, and as an executive producer and main cameraman on *Run,*

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[3] Alex Avila, "Filmmaker Observes Twentieth Anniversary," *Hispanic*, November 1996, 12.

[4] Chon Noriega, "The Migrant Intellectual," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* vol. 32, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 2.

[5] Gutiérrez's papers have been housed at Stanford University since their acquisition in 1999, while his first three feature films were restored and preserved by the UCLA Film and Television Archive in collaboration with the Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), as part of the CSRC's Chicano Cinema Recovery Project.

[6] Mona Lisa Faz, "Tell Whole Story About Gutierrez," *San Antonio Current*, September 9 – 15, 2004, 5.

Tecato, Run.[7] However, the interviews I conducted with a number of other individuals who worked on the films in question have revealed that she was much more heavily involved than the credits of these early films suggest. As will become clear, Faz served in a variety of production capacities not included above.[8] When asked about the way she claims (or perhaps better stated, fails to claim) ownership of the films in any way, Faz explains:

> I'm very modest. I don't push myself or anything. If Sabino [Garza] has something to say, he'll say it. You know, if Efraín has something to say, he'll say it about me. I don't need to push myself or anything because I know what I did and I know what happened, and so do people… so do the people who were around us.[9]

While it may be true that those close to the couple recognized the significance of Faz's role, for the most part, few have volunteered information regarding the extent of her involvement in the production of these feature films, and so her place in film history threatens to be lost to future generations and those who were not close to the filmmakers at the time they made the films.

While there do exist a handful of primary documents that point to Faz's involvement in the production of these historic features, they are few. One of the reasons documents are so scarce is that for the most part, Faz deliberately remained out of the press during the making of the films. It was due to disagreements with Gutiérrez that she says she usually refused interviews. Although she says the couple worked well together, Faz describes her relationship with Gutiérrez as volatile. She made efforts to keep that fact out of the public eye and did not

[7] The formal credits to which I refer reflect the way Faz is listed in the end credits of each of the films in which she participated.

[8] The exception is the film, *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre*. Faz was less involved with this film as she and Gutiérrez experienced a split during the time it was being made. However, she did have a small role, and she may have done some camerawork, for the couple mended their relationship towards the end of the film.

[9] Josey Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, January 15, 2008.

want to publicly contradict Gutiérrez.[10] The relative lack of critical attention to Faz's contributions at the time the films were made can therefore be seen as the result of a combination of several factors, including Faz's own decision to remain out of the spotlight (in addition to previously mentioned issues related to male-centered notions of history and of Chicano cinema, and the limitations of many models of authorship). This lack of documentation should not be confused with a lack of devotion to the projects on which Faz and Gutiérrez worked. Faz was strongly committed to the filmmaking process, which she viewed as a family endeavor. She was a filmmaker whose skills rapidly developed so that she became an indispensable member of Gutiérrez's team. The significance of the contributions that she subsequently made is undeniable, even if documentation that states that fact is scarce.

The relative lack of documentation detailing the extent and exact nature of Faz's filmmaking endeavors makes oral histories particularly vital to an investigation of her participation in the making of the first three of Gutiérrez's films, considered the formative works of his career. The following account is based upon several interviews conducted with Faz, Gutiérrez, cameraman David Peña, and editor/film instructor/mentor, Jack Landman, who worked on various aspects of the films with which this chapter is concerned. As expected, the production teams' memories of some events do, in fact, diverge from one another on numerous points. What all team members can agree upon, however, is the fact that Josey Faz was breaking new ground as one of the first Chicana filmmakers in history. She was not only a competent, capable filmmaker, but a vital component of Gutiérrez's filmmaking team. All sources support what journalist Arnoldo Villareal stated in 1979, in a rare article that acknowledged Faz's

[10] Ibid.

involvement in the films, at the time: Faz was a "film pioneer…in complete control of her craft."[11]

Faz is a figure who has been marginalized within an already marginal history. The following analysis of her film career is an attempt to make sense of the traces left in the historical record regarding her contributions to Chicana/o cinema. Historian Emma Pérez poses two questions relevant to the writing of a Chicana/o film history in her analysis of Chicana/o history, which has, like film history, excluded Chicanas from the record: 1) "Has Chicano/a history mimicked a patriotic story so much that a nationalist cause, in the name of decoloniality, has become the privileged history project?" and 2) "How will we choose to describe our past, now at this moment, as an enunciation in the present?"[12] In other words, whose history is it that is being written? It is imperative that we consistently ask ourselves: How do we interrogate the terrain of Latina/o film history so that we do not fall into the trap of obscuring one possible history (one that includes both Latina/o men and women) only because we are so eager to recover another (one male-dominated, which has traditionally obscured the participation of women who have been key to the movement)?

The case of Faz and Gutiérrez presents an opportunity to write a new kind of Chicana/o film history, one that acknowledges and celebrates the multitude of contributions (including those of women), as well as the synergistic forces that came together in order to bring these films into being. Particularly considering the trend away from master narratives, toward incorporating cultural and social histories in historical projects and the acknowledgment of multiple

[11] Arnoldo Villareal, "'Run Tecato Run': Why Chicano Films Are Hot," *Caracol* (San Antonio, Texas) 5.6, February 1979, 21.

[12] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 26-27.

subjectivities,[13] it follows that any version of the history of Chicana/o and Latina/o film should include a consideration of the perspectives of the communities of people who made these films possible, the least of whom should not be filmmakers' most intimate of collaborators, as is the case of Faz, whose partnership with Gutiérrez was both romantic and professional.

Family Business

Faz and Gutiérrez first met in San Antonio, Texas, when they dated very briefly during their high school years. They went their separate ways and then became involved in a more serious romantic relationship when their paths crossed again in 1970. Faz and Gutiérrez had become reacquainted in their mutual workplace, San Antonio's Model Cities, after Gutiérrez, San Antonio native, returned to Texas following his attempt at an acting career in Hollywood. Disillusioned by the limited opportunities available to Chicanas/os in the industry, and also inspired by the work of Luis Valdez and the Chicana/o theater group, *El Teatro Campesino*, Gutiérrez returned with an interest in establishing a theater group of his own. He asked Faz to assist him with the theater, Chicano Arts Theater, and, as she remembers it, in was primarily the accounting with which he initially asked for her to assist. Gutiérrez remembers that he also asked Faz to do some acting because of her striking beauty. Faz agreed and soon found herself touring the country to perform and attend conferences in which the Chicano Arts Theater was involved. David Peña, who was one of the youngest members of the theater group and would later become the cameraman for *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* and *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre*, remembers that it was Gutiérrez, Faz, and Sabino Garza (who would write the screenplay for

[13] See, for example, Sumiko Higashi, "In Focus: Film History, or a Baedeker Guide to the Historical Turn," *Cinema Journal* v. 44, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 94-100. Higashi calls for film studies' construction of "an interdisciplinary, inclusive, and inventive new forum" (99), where social and cultural histories meet film history, feminist history and the "rethinking [of] history as narrative" (95).

Please, Don't Bury Me Alive! and *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre*) who were the principle figures in charge of the theater. Peña explains that Faz's female presence was important to the group, which was predominantly male, and in fact, he says, it was Faz who "kind of glued it together."[14]

Although the theater work was rewarding, it ultimately did not satisfy Gutiérrez's desire to work in film. Furthermore, running the group, Gutiérrez says, was extremely physically draining. So by 1972, he decided to embark on the making of his first feature. He wanted to portray what he felt was a "true version of the Chicano lifestyle" not being depicted by either the Hollywood or Mexican film industries. He felt that both industries resorted to the use of stereotypes when depicting Chicanos, and he said, "We would like to stereotype ourselves, instead."[15] Because of his firm belief that "San Antonio has enough Latin talent to become a film-making center,"[16] Gutiérrez intended to build a new Chicano film community in Texas. He founded the production company, Chicano Arts Film Enterprises (CAFE), and set out to make the first Chicano feature film, *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*

Not a trained filmmaker, Gutiérrez sought advice, training, and experience from a variety of sources. As Noriega explains, he used "the barter system, happenstance, and personal connections" in order to acquire knowledge.[17] Faz, who was at his side at the time he was making his first films, was certainly one of the "personal connections" upon which Gutiérrez would come to rely. Along with Gutiérrez, she acquired knowledge that would make her a valuable asset to his team. For example, Gutiérrez "set out to learn about cinematography and

[14] David Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, July 10, 2009.

[15] "Movie Portrays Chicano Lifestyle In Film First," [Unknown newspaper] (Plainview, Texas).

[16] Frank Trejo, "S.A. Seen In Role of 'Hollywood,'" *San Antonio Light* [n.d.].

[17] Noriega, "The Migrant Intellectual," 11.

screenwriting from the Mexican film industry, traveling to Mexico City twice to do so."[18] Gutiérrez did not make the trips alone. Faz remembers one of these trips, which she and Gutiérrez made together in the summer of 1972:

> I think we had about $130. We drove all the way to Mexico City on that little money… We were trying to get a writer for *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*...We met Emilio Carballido and then we… sat [in] on some of his classes, because he was a playwright. And we got some connections on playwriting... [19]

Gutiérrez eventually chose San Antonio-based writer Sabino Garza to write the screenplay and the two men completed "their ad hoc filmmaking education when they worked as extras on the Mexican film *De sangre chicana* (Of Chicano Blood)"[20] in 1973. Faz also remembers being an extra on that film, as does Peña, who explains that all the members of the Chicano Arts Theater were invited to participate as extras on the film. He remembers that he and others in the theater group were able to study the small crew of the independent production, which made it a learning experience for everyone involved.[21]

Once pre-production for *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* was underway, Faz and Gutiérrez had also embarked on creating a family together. In January of 1974, their first child, Medea Faz was born. Their second child, Mona Lisa Faz, was born in August of 1977, and Faz says together, she and Gutiérrez were able to juggle the responsibilities of raising their small children and making films:

> It was just, you know, like… a family thing. Like if you have a business… you have a grocery store, you have a family… sometimes you're gonna sell, and sometimes you're

[18] Ibid., 8.

[19] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

[20] Noriega, "The Migrant Intellectual," 8.

[21] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

> gonna take care of the register… sometimes you're gonna be cleaning… It wasn't you know, like… "I want you to do this, I want you to do that." We were in it together, like we were together in the theater group, doing bookings… getting information from here, getting information from there. And sometimes [Efraín] would tell me who to call so I would call them. Or sometimes I would have an idea and he would go for it… the pieces just kind of fell into place.[22]

Faz had grown up with a strong sense of family and learned from her parents' example. She further explains, "When you have a partner… you help each other as much as you can." One of five girls born to Ignacio and Emma Faz, in Mathis, Texas (Northwest of Corpus Christi), Faz notes that her parents were "always real close… They always worked together." She describes her mother as a housewife who was "the head of the household. She took care of business." Her father, she says, worked as a mechanic for a construction company and when he retired, he opened his own auto mechanic shop, with the help of his wife, Emma.[23] The examples set by Faz's parents, who combined their personal and professional endeavors for the well-being of their family, clearly informed the way she approached her relationship with Gutiérrez (although the couple never married). The family, however, is often considered a feminine domain and subordinate to the political concerns that are the domain of men. Gutiérrez and Faz's lives, both personal and professional, were intertwined, and filmmaking was a part of their everyday routine. However, Faz's personal and practical reasons for becoming involved in filmmaking (her family) have largely obscured the significance of her contributions to Chicano film, while Gutiérrez's motivations have not diminished recognition of his efforts in the same way.

As Noriega explains Gutiérrez's motivations for becoming involved in filmmaking, he says his "reasons for making a feature film were at once practical, political, and personal. They

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[22] Josey Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, February 9, 2008.

[23] Ibid.

had nothing to do with the status of film as a mass medium, commercial product, and technological art."[24] Gutiérrez's early films were highly personal and address social and political issues affecting the Chicano community. Specifically, *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* was based upon the experiences of Gutiérrez's brother, who was a drug dealer, as well as one of Gutiérrez and Faz's high school friends, who was also involved with drugs and had been sent to prison. On another personal note, Faz remembers their daughter, Mona Lisa, was featured in a scene of *Run, Tecato, Run*, which Faz directed: "Efraín wanted to have her in the film, so he created… flashbacks of his little girl."[25] Clearly, the couple's personal lives influenced some of the content and structure of the films.

What is striking about Faz and Gutiérrez is their strength as a team stemmed from the intersection of their personal and professional lives. Faz's motivations for becoming involved in filmmaking were related to supporting her family. Like Gutiérrez's reasons for filmmaking, Faz's reasons were also "practical" and "personal," although they were not "political" in terms of a conscious effort on her part to participate in the Chicano movement. In fact, as Gutiérrez explains it, "Josey was not into the Chicano movement. She was more conservative… She was more middle class… I didn't really see her as very Chicana, you know?" A pleasant surprise to Gutiérrez, she soon began to dress more the part of a "Chicana," in that she had "the pants, the boots, *chalecos* [vests], the hair… She always made a very impressive appearance. Because she was like 6'8" [sic]. Real tall… She looked like a very sexy Chicana. So people started commenting on how good we looked because she started looking very indigenous."[26] It was not

[24] Noriega, "The Migrant Intellectual," 8.

[25] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

[26] Efraín Gutiérrez, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, July 7, 2009.

her actual political beliefs or her actions to which Gutiérrez (and to his mind, many others) were drawn. Rather, it was Faz's physical appearance that established her credibility in her partner's eyes.

Like many Chicana filmmakers, who Rosa Linda Fregoso notes have been "systematically excluded from participation by the reification of an artificial category, derived from arbitrary definitions about what constitutes 'Chicano' cinema," Faz's contributions as one of the first Chicana/o filmmakers (male or female), have been obscured. As is the case for so many of her contemporaries, Chicana/o cinema's largely being defined in terms of what Fregoso explains as a particular form of political agency, articulated and engaged by men,[27] has contributed to her being omitted from the historical record.

Interestingly, Gutiérrez's political stance has also been cause for his theater and film efforts to be challenged by members of the Chicano community. For example, as Peña remembers, during their participation at a *teatro* festival in California, the Chicano Arts Theater was highly criticized because in the eyes of the other *teatros* [theater troupes], "we weren't Chicano enough. That's what they said. Even though we were, you know, probably the most Chicano people there. We were actually Chicanos, you know, from the *barrio* and all that, but we weren't Chicano enough, and by that I mean we didn't know enough about *la cultura* [the culture]…." While the other groups, he explains, all included the Spanish word "*teatro*" in their names, Chicano Arts Theater did not, nor were they adorned with brightly colored, feathered costumes, as were so many of the other theater groups. Peña maintains, however, that the group was proud of their name and accomplishments, and the experience was a positive one.

[27] Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Chicana Film Practices: Confronting the 'Many-Headed Demon of Oppression,'" in *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*, ed. Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 169.

With regard to the films, which were made several years after Gutiérrez traveled with the theater group, Fred García notes that "Gutiérrez's films, despite their association with the Chicano Movement, reveal attitudes and behaviors inconsistent with prevailing attitudes within the contemporary Chicano worldview."[28] He suspects that is another reason that they have been somewhat overlooked. Although also concerned with social and political issues that contribute to the Chicano community's oppression, Gutiérrez's films did not conform to one specific ideological position. Faz remembers that during a screening of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, "Some people walked out… even a lot of Hispanic people who thought we were showing 'young punks.' But you have to see the whole movie – we were showing the raw truth from the *barrio*."[29] Rather than celebrate a mythic past and cultural heritage in order to uplift the community, Gutiérrez attacked racism from a different angle. He depicted Chicanos who were forced to make questionable decisions in order to survive their day-to-day lives. Many saw this approach as perpetuating existing stereotypes of Chicanos as drug addicts, thieves, and criminals. Gutiérrez's politics may have limited his recognition to a certain extent, but it is, in part, Faz's similar failure to conform to a particular form of political engagement that continues to limit her recognition as a filmmaker who made significant contributions to the very same films for which he now receives much attention.

With regard to the lack of recognition Faz has received, Gutiérrez explains:

> A lot of people kind of criticize me that I don't give [Josey] that much credit in the first film, even though she was involved. But like I remind people: she didn't really care about the first film. She wasn't really that supportive. As a matter of fact, she made an

[28] Fred García, "Run, Chicano, Run: Efraín Gutiérrez, in Search of the Individual Within Chicano Cinema" (M.A. Thesis, University of Texas – Pan American, 2006), 109.

[29] Ed Conroy, "Hispanic films to air in benefit showing," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 12, 1987, 4F.

interview and said the only reason she was doing it was because, you know, she was my girlfriend.[30]

Faz has explained that in addition to the accounting she originally agreed to do for the film, she only became more involved with *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* at the last minute, when the young woman originally hired to play the part of the main character, Alex's girlfriend, withdrew from the film. Faz says Gutiérrez told her, "Well, that's it. You're just gonna do the part, *y se acabó* [that's it]." She says she agreed "just to not give Efraín any more problems. He had enough problems as it was, to begin with."[31] In a rare interview in 1979 (likely the one to which Gutiérrez referred in the aforementioned quotation), Faz did mention, "I've acted in two movies, but not because I wanted to."[32] Rather, Faz indicates her commitment to Gutiérrez was what motivated her involvement in the films and she situates herself within traditional family discourse. While this resonates with Gutiérrez's assertions that Faz was relatively uninterested in some aspects of filmmaking and that her motivation was largely connected to her family, it does not confirm that she was uninterested in the projects overall, that her interest did not grow, or that her interest in film revolved only around Gutiérrez.

With regard to her role in *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, she explained during an interview, "I didn't really like the part because it was, you know like, you're the girlfriend… and you just stay home… She was just a dumb, you know, girl." The role was uncomfortable for Faz because she says, "I was NOT that type of woman. Never have been and I never will be,"[33] but

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[30] Erfaín Gutiérrez, personal interview by Chon Noriega and Michael Stone, Los Angeles, California, October 25, 2004.

[31] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

[32] Villareal, "'Run, Tecato, Run,'" 19.

[33] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, February 9, 2008.

she chose to support the work of her partner, and consequently her family by supporting the production of the film. As Peña remembers, Faz was, in fact, "very feminist," and although she regularly pointed out the struggles that were specific to Chicanas, and how women were "more behind," Peña admits that the men in the group "all ignored her."[34]

Similar to the way in which Gutiérrez addressed Chicano issues in personal terms, not necessarily in concert with the way in which the Chicano movement chose to address issues of discrimination and inequity at that time,[35] Faz attended to her rights and desires as a woman in ways that feminists of the time (or even today) would not necessarily approach them. She placed herself in an environment in which men disregarded her concerns about issues that were particular to the women in their community in order to work with Gutiérrez, but she did continue to be vocal about her opinions, whether or not they resulted in a shift in their attitude towards her and/or other Chicanas with similar concerns. By some accounts, Faz behaved in ways that a proper Chicana "should," by standing behind her partner regardless of her own personal feelings about the images of women in the films, yet by many accounts, she was also not Chicana enough. As Gutiérrez saw it, her class status prevented her from engaging in the same political discourse that dominated the Chicano movement so focused on working-class struggles. Ultimately, however, it is clear that her actions, her participation in the making of these early Chicano features, certainly supported that movement. Similarly, whether or not she conformed to ideas of how a feminist behaved, by venturing into the male-dominated world of filmmaking,

[34] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[35] As García notes, Gutiérrez's films were more personal than historical, based on the experiences of Texas Chicanos, not the California experience of urban Chicano life. They provided a "bleak" worldview" and, in fact, questioned the Chicano community's leaders, providing "essentially an intra-familial commentary." García, "Run, Chicano, Run," 124-127.

learning and commanding the skills as few women before her had, she also must be recognized as breaking new ground for women at this time.

It is significant that the journalist who conducted the rare interview with Faz (quoted above) highlighted the fact that, "home to Josie does not particularly emphasize cleaning house or having babies. Josie is of a different breed, she is the type of woman that women libbers would like to be like, but she might prove to be too much even for women libbers." He explains that Faz had been Gutiérrez's "camera person" for six years at the time of the interview, and that she had served as his "right hand."[36] Like Gutiérrez, who had his own ideas about what it meant to be Chicano and make Chicano films, Faz had her own ideas about what it meant to be a strong Chicana/woman. Both Faz and Gutiérrez had their own ideas with regard to the location of their own power and their experience of it, and each remained true to themselves. They were, simply put, extremely strong-willed, which was largely the source of their personal conflicts.

Faz: A "Natural" Producer

In 1974, when Gutiérrez was ready to begin production of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, he approached Trinity University's newly created Department of Journalism, Broadcasting and Film for assistance with the project. As scholars such as Noriega, García, and Sonny Espinoza have noted, it was Jack Landman who provided Gutiérrez and his team with the training and guidance necessary to make the first Chicano feature.

Landman remembers Faz's involvement in the films as an actor, editor, and producer. He explains that Gutiérrez had initially intended for Faz to play a role in *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*:

[36] Villareal, "'Run, Tecato, Run,'" 21.

> If for nothing else, because she was a beautiful woman. But it went beyond that, because Josey quickly demonstrated producer skills. When Efraín would just say, "Well, let's just go over there and we'll figure it out when we get there," she understood pre-planning, pres-shooting, knowing certain things are under your control. And Efraín just almost right away began to look to her as, "You're gonna make sure that I'm able to do this movie, because you understand, and you're a better organizer." She was a better planner. I think she was a better communicator often… and she ultimately would do quite a bit of the talking in a situation where there was a need.[37]

Peña echoes Landman's thoughts about the significance of Faz's input and the fact that she quickly exhibited producing skills. He explains that as far back as his experience with the Chicano Arts Theater, he felt Faz influenced many things. He explains, "I think she kinda influenced a lot of stuff, on performances… she brought that female presence to it. I think it kinda made it more accessible." Specifically with regard to *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, he states:

> She was a Chicana at the time and she pulled it off. And of course, she was a producer, because she was helping Efraín a lot - do just about everything - even though she didn't get credit. But she was helping him make the decisions.[38]

Despite the fact that Faz's signature may not be discernable when looking at the films and only traces of her contributions are present in the historical documents, Faz and Gutiérrez learned about filmmaking together, from the beginning, and her presence made a difference in terms of what ended up on the screen. The couple functioned as a team on multiple levels, and although Noriega does not discuss Faz in his article, "The Migrant Intellectual," from which the earlier-mentioned quotes are taken, he and other scholars have acknowledged that she was an important part of Gutiérrez's team. Noriega makes it explicit in his 1991 dissertation, *Road to*

[37] Jack Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, San Antonio, Texas, July 9, 2009.

[38] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

Aztlán: Chicanos and Narrative Cinema, for example. He explains that the first Chicano features were "produced in South Texas between 1976 and 1979 by the San Antonio-based husband and wife production team, Efraín Gutiérrez (writer-director-actor) and Josie [sic] Faz (cinematographer)."[39]

More recently, in his 2006 dissertation, *Run, Chicano, Run: Efraín Gutiérrez, in Search of the Individual Within Chicano Cinema*,[40] Fred García explains that Faz and Gutiérrez were an "artistic union," making the creative nature of their relationship explicit. He explains that Faz was credited as a cinematographer on *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre* and *Run, Tecato, Run*, as well as an actor in the first two films, and he does indicate that understanding the nature of Faz and Gutiérrez's creative union is imperative to understanding Gutiérrez's films.[41] However, like Noriega's mention of the pair, the nature and significance of Faz's involvement in the production of the films is not explored in any detail and inclusion of Faz in the history of the making of these films remains little more than a side note. Although it might not be expected that García acknowledge Faz's efforts with the Chicano Arts Theater, or the fact that her contributions extended far beyond what is reflected in the historical documents and the films themselves, García even overlooks the formal producing credit she received on *Run, Tecato, Run* (as he does the sound credit previously mentioned). He does, however, insert a cinematography credit on *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre* which does not appear in the film credits, and Faz does remember doing a small amount of camerawork on the film. However, all parties with whom I spoke agree this was the film with which she was least involved and no other individuals recall

[39] Chon Noriega, "Road to Aztlán: Chicanos and Narrative Cinema" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Modern Thought and Literature, Stanford University, 1991), 99.

[40] García, "Run, Chicano, Run," 38.

[41] Ibid., 40.

her doing camerawork on *Amor Chicano es Para Siempre*, as they do on *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, for which she also received no screen credit. This highlights the fact that it is difficult to identify precise moments of creative contribution to the films. Attributing particular creative contributions to individual filmmakers in this case is challenging both because the oral histories conducted for this project were performed more than thirty years after the making of the films, and also because of the nature of making independent films. Boundaries between production capacities are often blurred in situations where time and resources are scarce. Inevitably, filmmakers step in whenever and wherever they are needed in order to get the job done. What is important to note in this case is that, as García explains, "When not acting in his projects (of which she was highly critical), Faz would jump behind the camera and play an active role in the photography of Gutíerrez's films."[42] Many of the oral histories I have conducted, in fact, prove that she "jumped in" to perform a variety of roles other than that of a cameraperson. She contributed in various ways that have not been acknowledged, her role – as editor and producer – being of particular significance to the minds of both Landman and Peña.

As García describes the filming of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, "production occurred whenever monies and actors were available,"[43] and it is Gutiérrez alone who he credits for keeping things together for two years. García notes that Gutiérrez found a collaborator in screenwriter Sabino Garza,[44] and that "the completed project owes much to the efforts of Jack Landman and various students from Trinity University."[45] Faz's presence in these relationships remains invisible, as it does in the discussion of the film's editing. García notes that Gutiérrez

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 48.

[44] Ibid., 44.

[45] Ibid., 48.

spent much time learning "as much as he could about the editing process"[46] during post-production on the film.

As Landman remembers it, however, both Gutiérrez and Faz regularly sat at the editing table with him, and they learned quickly. Gutiérrez, he explained, did not necessarily have the patience to learn in the ways that Faz did. He mentioned that often times he would end up explaining procedures to Faz as Gutiérrez would say, "Tell Josey about this and she'll tell me how it is and tell me later." Landman elaborated:

> I would be kinda mad cuz I knew, ok, Efraín, you're the one that's gotta do this. I'm trying to show you, but it ended up being Josey I was showing it to. And so, she was really… she was the hardcore filmmaker, the student of filmmaking. And she just, she picked up things just by seeing them. She'd ask a question about something shown to her, but she was the student, and she was really learning… I would definitely say, to my mind, she knew more about film production than he did. I mean… she became the most knowledgeable about what it takes to make a movie whether you're in the editing room, whether you're loading the camera, whether you're aiming the camera, whatever you're doing. She was just progressively just, every minute getting better and better, and… more confident. I mean she was so smart. She [was] just incredibly smart. She retained information terrifically. [47]

Landman says he was the principle editor, and he taught Faz and Gutiérrez, along with whatever configuration of crew members happened to be around or take interest during that day, how to edit, as they went along. By the end of the film, Landman explains, Faz and Gutiérrez had purchased their own European editing table, which was of very high quality. Landman says that they had truly "mastered" editing by the time they bought the table (without his knowledge) and he remembers being "blown away" by their abilities and progress. Peña, incidentally, remembers visiting the couple as they edited *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* on the equipment Landman

[46] Ibid., 50.

[47] Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

describes, and while he says he watched and tried to learn, it was Faz and Gutiérrez who were editing the film together.

The above scenario is recounted not in an attempt to claim Faz as the "true" editor in the team, but rather to indicate that she did learn many skills and share information with Gutiérrez in ways that benefitted him and his production teams from the very beginning. Gutiérrez's relationships did not exist independently from Faz, but rather were a complex web of relationships among individuals who were contributing various energies at different moments, as individuals were needed and able. As I will show, Faz mediated many of Gutiérrez's creative relationships with his collaborators just as she mediated his relationship with Landman. Faz was, in large part, responsible for creating much of the stability that enabled Gutiérrez to complete his early projects.

As Gutiérrez remembers, Faz "was with me, and she participated, but it was like if you were just part of a movie as an extra or something."[48] That is, until the final film, when he remembers that he enjoyed "collaborating" with Faz. Gutiérrez says she was much more involved with this film, including casting, editing, and even directing. For this, he credits Faz as one of the first Chicanas to be involved with Chicano film. It may be that to Gutiérrez's mind, Faz did not show the kind of interest he hoped she would from the very beginning of his career. Perhaps she was not as enthused as he would have expected. Gutiérrez clearly welcomes the participation of his romantic partners in his creative endeavors. For example, he explains that he had wanted for his first wife to be involved with the theater when it started, but she refused. His current wife, Irma, is also highly involved with Gutiérrez's revitalized career. He explains that he enjoys working with a partner, especially one that knows him very well. While he appreciates

[48] Gutiérrez, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

and acknowledges the significance of Faz's role in the last of the three features they worked on together, to say she was simply a bystander for all but *Run, Tecato, Run*, would be to severely underestimate the role that she played.

With the few exceptions that have been noted, the discourse around Faz has primarily been contained by her status as Gutiérrez's girlfriend, as someone who provided support in traditionally passive ways. Scholars' foregrounding of Faz and Gutiérrez's union, as well as Gutiérrez's accomplishments, and the incomplete analysis of Faz's work leave much room for additional research. One of the most telling accounts of how Faz is remembered is her exclusion from Sonny Espinoza's dissertation, which includes an entire chapter devoted to the work of Efraín Gutiérrez[49] without ever mentioning Faz by name. She is only referenced once, and that reference is in negative terms. Espinoza explains that after *Run, Tecato, Run*, Gutiérrez felt his girlfriend (who it is safe to assume is Faz) led backers to believe that he could not be trusted. Gutiérrez is positioned as having been sabotaged, his sometimes questionable judgment overshadowed by the blame placed on this unnamed girlfriend. She is never acknowledged as having contributed positively to any of the films Gutiérrez made, but instead portrayed as a vengeful, spurned lover. As I will continue to detail, crew members and a smattering of primary documents have verified that she was an important player in the production of the films, much more than just "the girlfriend," and certainly not a purely negative drain on the productions.

According to Landman and Peña, although she was not always formally credited as such, one of Faz's most significant roles was that of producer. Landman explains that her patience and

[49] Sonny Richard Ernest Espinoza. "Chicanismo in Film and Popular culture: Betwixt and Between Cinematic and Institutional Borders" (Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, 2001), 370. The analysis of Gutiérrez's career is part of Espinoza's larger exploration of the ways in which Chicanas/os have been constructed as occupying a liminal cultural space in films made both in the U.S. and in Mexico. The study involves textual analysis as well as an investigation of the production histories of Holywood westerms, Mexican films starring Tin Tan, representations of the *Tejano* singer, Selena, and of course, the early films made by Efraín Gutiérrez.

level-headed approach complimented Gutiérrez's unbridled enthusiasm in that she "knew there would never be a film unless there was a professional approach to the production issues. And so, you know, she was playing that role, right away. You know, well beyond just playing a part in the film." In his words, "she was just a natural."[50]

Trinity University – Interfacing with the (Chicano) Community in San Antonio

Jack Landman explains that at the time Gutiérrez approached what was then Trinity University's Department of Journalism, Broadcasting, and Film to assist him with making his film, they had film equipment of incredibly high quality; so much so that it was in great commercial demand.[51] Trinity University is a private institution with tremendous resources, and at the time, they were working with German made Arriflex cameras**,** which Landman says, "was just unheard of… TV stations had little [American made] CP16s. So we just had better equipment all the way around." Furthermore, he explains that Bill Hays, the Chair of the department at that time, was asked by the university "to come not only be a teacher, but to really manage this huge interest that the community had in Trinity's tools." He was given a mandate to both manage the Department's equipment, as well as to "interface with the community."[52] In an effort to become more involved with the local community, community members were given the opportunity to utilize Trinity film equipment in exchange for providing Trinity film students with experience as part of their film crews.

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[50] Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[51] Just to give a sense of the resources available, by the late 70s, the department had "received state-wide recognition and over $1 million of studio equipment." The Trinitonian News Department, "In Memory of Chairman Bill Hays," *The Trinitonian* (San Antonio), March 2, 1979, 3.

[52] Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

When Gutiérrez asked Hays to provide him with the training and equipment he needed in order to produce the first Chicano feature film, Hays, Landman explains, felt it was an exciting opportunity for the department to be involved with the community. He introduced Landman and Gutiérrez and put Landman in charge of dealings with the aspiring filmmaker. Landman was immediately impressed with the project and says that they quickly began moving forward. According to Landman, Gutiérrez brought Faz to their very next meeting, and it was at that meeting he recognized she was an important part of Gutiérrez's team. Not long after that, he met Sabino Garza, who had written the script for *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*. As expected, Trinity students (and a couple of staff members) were involved with the initial film shoots and were generally excited about the opportunity to work with Gutiérrez and his team, which presented a much different opportunity than anything else the Trinity crew had been involved with in the past.[53] Landman's role then, was essentially that of an instructor, advisor, mentor, liaison, and advocate for Gutiérrez and his team. As Espinoza explains it, "Trinity University played a major role in the production"[54] in terms of providing support and facilities, which of course, included Landman.

Landman remembers that Gutiérrez and his crew received on-the job-training and while "at any given time there might have been a different person tagging along that day,"[55] particularly during the early part of their training, it was principally and consistently Gutiérrez, Faz, and Garza whom he taught how to make a film. The first thing that the production crew did was film a scene that was intended to function as a demo, to be used to raise additional funding

[53] Landman does note that there were individuals who were more cynical about the prospect. Their feelings were that the community filmmakers could not possibly succeed at making a film, which required extensive training that could not be condensed into the short amount of time Landman's student/staff crew could provide.

[54] Espinoza, "Chicanismo in Film and Popular Culture," 360.

[55] Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

for the film. Landman says the scene involved a fight in a pool hall, which was shot entirely according to Gutiérrez's wishes, including the action, the script, and many other details. Landman explains that he was what might be considered the "technical director" of the scene, only because Gutiérrez and his team came with no knowledge about how to communicate with the crew, or how to move the camera from one place to another, for example.

The Trinity/Gutiérrez team worked a grueling 16-hour day during that shoot. Gutiérrez and his team had watched the entire crew in action, and were learning very rapidly. They felt confident they would be able to learn the skills necessary to make the film. Financial constraints were such that Gutiérrez's cash flow would make paying the minimal Trinity fees involved in the making of the film (e.g., film stock and processing) on a consistent basis difficult. So as Landman sees it, Gutiérrez "knew that in the long run he had to train himself and Josey and his people."[56] Faz says that remembers working "side by side" with Landman, learning "the editing, the filming, how to read the light… how to focus, how to work the camera…"[57]

In addition, Landman explains that they shot the initial pool hall scene as professionally as possible, as if it were a television commercial. The result, he says, was more polished than Gutiérrez intended for his film to look. He wanted something with "rough edges," that looked more like "real life," according to Landman. With regard to the rest of the crew, he explains, "Efraín's style was crazy to them. They couldn't picture him being the boss of them for very long without them going crazy, you know? Because… they were learning it by the book and he was gonna do it anything but by the book." The rest of the Trinity crew soon fell off of the production.

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

Despite the policy regarding the exchange of equipment and resources for experience for their students, Trinity University allowed Gutiérrez to continue utilizing their resources. Landman explains that Trinity was "still comfortable because they looked at it as, you know, this is a different thing than we've done in the community before, and it has PR value. It has good deed value to it." Indeed, the University was becoming involved with the local community, as Hays had been mandated to ensure. It is doubtless that the project was of even greater value, however, because of the segment of the local community with which it was becoming involved: the Chicano community. Trinity was, and remains, a wealthy, private university, with a predominantly white, upper-middle class student body, situated in a relatively economically depressed city that has an extremely large Chicano/Mexican population. Landman says that at the time, he was unfamiliar with the Chicano community. He had no close friends or contact of any kind with anyone as "authentic" as Gutiérrez and his community. The two had much to gain and learned tremendously from one another through the making of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* Communication between them, however, was not necessarily an easy task. It was one which Faz facilitated, on numerous levels. More specifically, when it came to Landman, Faz quite literally helped him to communicate with Gutiérrez and the rest of his team. Landman explains that from the beginning, he felt Faz was an intelligent woman from whom he hoped to learn. He says:

> When all of [Efraín's] friends would get together, almost instantaneously, conversation would be full speed Spanish. I would get lost pretty quick. Josey helped me learn Spanish… after the fact I'd say, "Well, what did he mean when he said this or that?' She'd explain it to me and always had a lot of sympathy for the fact that here was this guy in the room who was gonna get lost and so she was kind of watching out for me, which I appreciated.[58]

Peña also notes that Faz's presence was very positive for the group. He says:

[58] Landman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

> It was good to have a woman there… It was kind of good because she kind of mellowed us out. And she's not a very mellow person. She's very strong and all that. To me she was more like an *Adelita*. She was very beautiful and very powerful, you know? She wasn't shy at all about showing her feelings. The way she felt and the way she came across was very *macho*.

On the one hand, Peña felt it was her feminine touch that made her so valuable to the group, but on the other, her masculine energy is what he says earned her respect and gained her power.[59] She embodied a number of traits that cannot easily be pigeonholed, but found ways to wield her power in ways that benefitted, her, her family, the team, and the community.

Synergy as a Form of Authorship

In addition to her role as an actor in the film, Faz remembers doing a more limited amount of sound and editing on *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* than on *Run, Tecato, Run*, which she agrees she participated in more than the other films. She says about the first film, clearly, it "was [Efraín's] vision."[60] In keeping with romantic notions of the auteur as having a personal vision that comes to dominate his (or her) films, Gutiérrez was the driving force behind these early Chicano films. That is not to say, however, that his was the only vision to shape the final product that ended up on celluloid. To be clear, the goal of this analysis is not to assign particular moments of creative genius to either Faz or Gutiérrez. Rather, it is to stress the significance of the collaboration between the two, which resulted in the making of Chicano film history; it is to establish signs of authorship that might be shared in this body of work that the couple created

[59] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[60] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

together, along with their community, recognizing the film as a product of more than the single vision of the director alone.

Sabino Garza, screenwriter of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!*, noted in a 1976 interview:

> It would be easy for us to say that we have made it on our own… The truth is that a lot of raza helped us achieve what we set out to do. Perhaps you will never know who they were, but they were there when we needed them.[61]

This quote is taken from a story covering the release of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* in San Antonio, Texas, and was accompanied by a photograph of Gutiérrez and Faz, with the following caption: "Mr. and Mrs. Efraín Gutiérrez sign autographs at the premiere of 'Don't Bury Me Alive'." If viewers might never know the identities of the scores of community members who Garza indicates supported the production and distribution of this film, Faz is certainly identifiable as a contributing member who claimed at least limited ownership of the film, enough to warrant her signing autographs among the community. As Gutiérrez's wife, it went without saying that Faz had contributed to the film and at the moment of its release, both she and Gutiérrez were identified as the major forces behind this exciting event in the Chicana/o film community.

Locating the precise source of creative contribution to the production of a film is always difficult. In the case of Faz and Gutiérrez, the task is virtually impossible. This is not surprising, for according to Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, particularly when it comes grassroots community film and video, assigning authorship is complicated. Her essay, "Grassroots Authors: Collectivity and

[61] "Crowds Line Up to See 'Please Don't Bury Me Alive,'" *Chicano Times* (San Antonio) v. 7, n. 90 (April 9–23, 1976): 1, 6.

Construction in Community Video,"[62] deals specifically with the Scribe Video Center in Philadelphia during the 1980s (I will subsequently be referring to one of Scribe's projects, the Community Visions program). However, many of the issues she raises directly relate to the circumstances of production that applied to Gutiérrez and his filmmaking teams during the 1970s. In fact, Espinoza claims that Gutiérrez's films "were effectively grass roots in character."[63] As I will show, they share many characteristics with the videos Wong describes.

For example, the works she deems "alternative grassroots" media, she describes as being created by largely nonprofessional videographers for a particular target audience, not for the purposes of narrative or aesthetic pleasure, but to communicate some oppositional message. All of these criteria apply to the films made by Gutiérrez and his teams. Furthermore, regarding grassroots authorship, she emphasizes two points which are especially salient with regard to Gutiérrez's productions: 1) "the general producers and the community organization sponsoring the product see such authorship as collective rather than individual," and 2) "community authorship remains subordinate to message."[64]

With regard to the first point, Gutiérrez's grassroots production employed the talents of his extended community, which circulated in and out of the "collective," as Espinoza refers to the members of Gutiérrez's production team, CAFE. Espinoza notes that members of this collective functioned "not as mere romantic street documentarians of social change, but as self-examining, grass roots-based social critics."[65] The primary difference between the community

[62] Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong,"Grassroots Authors: Collectivity and Construction in Community Video," in *Authorship and Film*, ed. David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), 213-231.

[63] Espinoza, "Chicanismo in Film and Popular Culture," 335.

[64] Wong, "Grassroots Authors," 214-215.

[65] Espinoza, "Chicanismo in Film and Popular Culture," 339.

video productions Wong discusses and those produced by Gutiérrez's "collective" are that the former videographers enter the production process with a clear understanding that they function as a collective, within which their individual identities will be subsumed. Gutiérrez's teams, on the other hand, entered the process understanding their positions within their community, and as part of a team, but not necessarily as part of a formal "collective" with equal amounts of power. There was no sponsoring organization to speak of (although the filmmakers had many informal "sponsors," to be sure), and Gutiérrez clearly spearheaded the operation. However, as Espinoza notes, "Despite the perceived egocentrism that critics have read from his assertive reputation and the numerous credits he gives himself in his films, Gutiérrez shared duties and worked with cohorts as a collective."[66]

With regard to Wong's second point, that issues of authorship are subordinate to message, Gutiérrez's collective was just as willing to relinquish authorship of the films to Gutiérrez as they would have been to any formally constructed "community production," as identified in Wong's study. In this case of Gutiérrez's films, his production company, CAFE's productions, and community productions functioned as one and the same. Wong claims that Community Visions' "authors are not supposed to champion their own creative visions but to deliver a collective message to audiences who in turn would reshape their vision." She notes the importance of team members sharing jobs where everyone does almost everything at some point or another.[67] As has been discussed, this is very much the model under which Gutiérrez and his team worked. The lines between production capacities were virtually non-existent. However, Wong admits that even within community video projects, "Those within community production also take on unequal responsibility and control. This becomes especially evident in long nights of

[66] Ibid.

[67] Wong, "Grassroots Authors," 220.

editing when one person makes choices, even with the acquiescence of the group." Furthermore, she highlights that although some elements of particular films or videos may "highlight the individual as artist even within a collective piece," it is possible to "recognize themselves in the behavior of other of their peer groups."

The implication for Gutiérrez's productions is that even though, in this case, Gutiérrez may have functioned as the lead and been eager to take credit for multiple functions in the productions, it does not imply that the unequal power and control experienced within this context is any more than that of any other community production, once the production process was underway. If we recognize the collective authorship of community productions such as those discussed in Wong's study, it follows that the process at work in Gutiérrez's grassroots productions should be similarly recognized.

Furthermore, because collective authorship is, in part, defined by the participants' intents of producing a work in which they share responsibilities and authorship, it is not possible to simply apply the term to community endeavors such as those made by Gutiérrez and his team. Again, Gutiérrez did clearly spearhead the projects and he absolutely deserves distinction for his vision and efforts. To claim him the auteur in community projects such as these, however, is to undervalue the work of others. The authorship of the films belongs somewhere between Gutiérrez and the community.

Because the majority of filmmakers involved in these projects were not personally invested in claiming authorship of the films, but rather took pride in participating in a group effort for the betterment of their community, individuals may have not even been clear about their own contributions, the precise moments of their creative input being that much less discernable. There were, however, moments in which some members of the team made efforts to

assure their own creative vision was included in the film. Peña, for example, clearly remembers that he and Gutiérrez had a difference of opinion with regard to how certain scenes should be shot on numerous occasions. He says that in several instances, he intentionally shot the film according to his own aesthetic vision rather than the way Gutiérrez instructed him to film it, which Gutiérrez objected to upon seeing the final footage. Peña says the two butted heads because of what Peña attributes to Gutiérrez's commitment to the *Tejano* scene (as evidenced by his films), while he was much more influenced by and involved in rock music. Peña further explains that because he was so young, he often did a lot of "stupid stuff" that caused tension between himself and Gutiérrez. The tension was significant enough that initially, Peña says, Gutiérrez had not wanted to use him for the first film. He believes that it was Faz "as a producer," who appreciated his past commitment to the theater and convinced Gutiérrez otherwise.

Peña says that he was not involved in the first few shoots of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* nor did he receive any training as the others did with the Trinity University crew. He did learn some of the basics of filmmaking during a free one-day class with "guerilla filmmakers" from Mexico, at the Mexican American Unity Council, which he attended with Alberto Diaz and Jerry Garcia, two other members of the theater group with whom he had remained close. Peña had wanted to act in the film, but also pursued his interest in production so that he would have skills to contribute to the project. Once Peña joined the team, Gutiérrez shared a few things he had learned about camerawork from his experience with the Trinity crew, who went on to film a good portion of the film. Peña indicates that he, Gutiérrez, Faz, and Garza all took turns shooting

the film. There was no set schedule, nor did the filmmakers discuss ways to keep the camera style consistent. He describes the process quite simply: "Whoever was available would do it."[68]

As Faz remembers, Gutiérrez often preferred a flawed film to taking the extra time and care to assure a higher quality product. Time and resources were limited and the film that finally found its way to the screen was not the result of precise planning and vision. Gutiérrez confirmed when he explained, "The problem was that film back then was very expensive. So I always tried to do things in three. If we didn't get it in the third shot… You know unless it was really, really, really important. I was gonna do it whatever one came out."[69] Gutiérrez, with the help of Faz and others, pieced together all the elements necessary to bring the films to fruition, as time and resources would allow. Rather than characterize the process of making these films a collaborative one, implying complete cooperation among participants working towards a common goal/vision, it is more appropriate to view Gutiérrez's filmmaking process as one that involves synergistic authorship. Key members of the community contributed their resources and energies to create these historic films, and they were ultimately coordinated in the best way possible to approximate Gutiérrez's vision.

The Personal is Professional

Overall, Faz recalls filmmaking with Gutiérrez, fondly:

> We learned everything [about filmmaking] from the bottom all the way to the distribution… And we loved it… We had the editing table in the living room. And we would fight over editing. It was 5 o'clock in the morning and we were still editing. Ok, now let me… no you… And come here… Is it in synch or not?[70]

[68] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[69] Gutiérrez, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[70] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

Occupying a central position in their home, the editing table, and filmmaking more generally speaking, was placed center stage in their life together, and they shared the joys and trials associated with that journey.

Gutiérrez concedes Faz was more influential in the last of the three features, *Run, Tecato, Run*, where she served as a camerawoman and executive producer.[71] Faz remembers she also did a significant amount of editing and sound work, and overall, she had much more input on this film. She says, "We didn't have anybody else. It was just me and [Efraín], really. The script was like little pieces of paper. We didn't even have a set script. We kinda went along… as he thought up the scene."[72] Gutiérrez says that "If she hadn't have come in, I don't think I would have been able to focus. There was too many outside pressures coming in. So working with her… I enjoyed it because now we were collaborating. [73]

Regardless of the precise contributions Faz made to the first two films, it is important to recognize that had Faz not been present and learned from the previous film and theater projects, she would have been unable to be such an instrumental part of that last film crew. Although Faz may have been a relatively silent partner during her days with the Chicano Arts Theater, and perhaps on the first feature film (again, this claim is questionable), these were important moments during which Faz was acquiring knowledge, similar to the way in which Gutiérrez and other crew members were. In the end, she did serve in several capacities, for some of which she has been formally recognized, others only superficially so, and still others, not at all. It is, most

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[71] Gutiérrez, personal interview by Chon Noriega and Michael Stone.

[72] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

[73] Gutiérrez, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

specifically, her roles in the earliest films that her participation has been particularly difficult to establish.

Near the end of the 1970s, about the same time that they completed *Run, Tecato, Run*, Faz and Gutiérrez ended their personal relationship. Gutiérrez moved to Laredo, Texas, shortly thereafter, and as Noriega describes, his "films had been presumed lost or destroyed since 1980, when the filmmaker himself mysteriously disappeared."[74]

Faz remained in San Antonio and although her interest in film may have begun with Gutiérrez, it did not end with the work that they did together. She and Peña remember that she worked as a cameraperson and producer on Peña's film *Machín*, which was never completed. Also, during the early 1980s, Faz says she began working on a short documentary of her own, which explored the world of lowriding. However, Faz found it difficult to pursue her project due to the sexism she experienced. She shot footage for her film, but explained the subjects treated her more like a groupie than a filmmaker, and they failed to take her seriously. Faz eventually abandoned the project in favor of focusing her energy on her children.

While primary sources that document Faz's contributions are few, they do leave traces of divergent strains of her history with the films that warrant further examination. A 1987 *Express-News* article by Ed Conroy stands apart from the early newspaper accounts in which Faz largely deferred recognition to Gutiérrez, as it indicates that she may have claimed more ownership of the films in later years, or that, at least, she articulated her connection to them in terms not previously documented. It also suggests that she identified herself as a filmmaker, one who pursued projects unconnected to Gutiérrez, for whom she has mostly been depicted as support. Conroy referred to Faz as a "San Antonio filmmaker" in the 1987 article, which described a film

[74] Noriega, "The Migrant Intellectual," 2.

series of early Chicano cinema that included a screening of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!* Faz helped to bring the series, which was a benefit for her handicapped daughter, Medea, together, with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. The series and the events included a "special reception for Josie [sic] Faz and several members of her original casts."[75]

Certainly, the community recognized Faz as a filmmaker, in part, on the basis of her work with Gutiérrez. However, in addition, the news article identifies that Faz was working "towards the production of a new film based on her daughter's life in the nursing home to which she is confined." She did shoot footage of Medea in her youth, and she continued to document her life through still photography well into her adult life. Faz explained that she still contemplated one day making a film about the difficulties associated with raising a handicapped child. However, that project, what Faz called a "personal trip," more than anything else, did not materialize before Faz's death in 2011. Faz also fondly remembered producing and directing a public access show, "Kids Today," which featured her daughter, Mona Lisa, but most of her filmmaking endeavors were in the service of her family, in one way or another. In the end, her priority had been to raise her daughters, and not to make films.

Faz's commitment to her community and her family (which indeed, is part of the community), may not have been expressed in ways that male-centered politicos articulated their aims during the 1970s, but even if Faz had been involved with the films only because of her sense of family and community, it is not a safe assumption to say that this motivation was altogether apolitical. The fact of the matter remains that although Faz may have been critical of some of the content of the films, she contributed her energy, skills, and ideas to the process of making films she believed depicted an untold reality of *barrio* life at a time when no other

[75] Conroy, "Hispanic films to air."

Chicanas were working on feature films. Faz did not overtly claim to speak for or as a feminist, nor as a Chicana filmmaker, but as the journalist Villareal suggested, whether she identified as a feminist or not, Faz's strength, determination, and accomplishments make her a model for feminists, among others.

Josey Faz: Buried Alive

Gutiérrez, Faz, Garza, Peña, and many others who participated in the production of *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!,* were intent on raising awareness regarding the injustices that many Chicanos experience in the United States. Proud of their culture and their communities and hopeful for a future that promised more opportunities than years past, the filmmakers sought to validate a version of the Mexican-American experience that had been elided from mainstream attention in the United States. The Chicano community in the film was largely defined in opposition to the Anglo world to create solidarity and an empowered Chicano identity.

Please, Don't Bury Me Alive! is especially notable for its commentary on the limited choices available to working class Chicanos in San Antonio, Texas. The story of a young Chicano, Alex, living in the *barrio* on the West Side of San Antonio, the film opens with a funeral for Alex's brother, who was killed in the Vietnam War. As Alex witnesses the injustices that his community faces every day, he considers the life options available to him: obtaining a college education, serving in the military, living a life of hard manual labor or one of crime and poverty. While some of the decisions Alex makes may be questionable, the film challenges viewers to recognize the circumstances that surround the difficult choices those living in the *barrio* are forced to make.

In a tender moment between Alex (played by Gutiérrez) and his girlfriend (who is unnamed and played by Faz), Alex looks pensively off into the distance:

GF: What's the matter?
Alex: Nothing, I was just thinking…
GF: What are you thinking about, this time? *La raza* again, right?
Alex: Yeah…
GF: What's bothering you this time?
Alex: You know I'm just thinking, we don't have any leaders.
GF: We have a lot of Chicanos that are politicians.
Alex: That's not the leaders that I'm talking about. Na, you know? I'm talking about leaders *que tienen concencia, que tienen corazón, que SON Chicanos* [that have a conscience, that have a heart, that ARE Chicanos]. You know, half of the politicians, *ya no son Chicanos* [they're not Chicanos, anymore]. As soon as they were elected into office, man…
GF: What?
Alex: *Se metieron con los gabachos*. [They got in with the white men.] They became Anglicized.
GF: Mmmmm Hmmmm…
Alex: *Les da vergüenza de ser Mexicano*. *Les da vergüenza de su cultura*. [They're embarrassed of being Mexican. They're embarrassed of their culture.]
GF: They're married to *gabachas* [white women].
Alex: Half of them are married to *gabachas* [white women]….[76]

As his girlfriend notices that he is mentally somewhere else, the protagonist, Alex, contemplates the top priority in his life: the profound plight of the Chicano community. Furthermore, Alex emphasizes the importance of partnerships (both romantic and communal) among Chicanas/os. His speech in this scene, and his girlfriend's position throughout the film, can be read as an allegory for the way that Faz has been historicized. For, although Faz was Gutiérrez's partner on many levels, she does not fall neatly into the categories that would make her a "worthy" subject of historical/film scholarship (i.e., director, male). She seems to remain in the background in a way similar to Alex's girlfriend does in the film. Now, as we contemplate the history of what are usually thought of as Gutíerrez's early works, the way Faz is consigned to the background is

[76] *Please, Don't Bury Me Alive!/¡Por favor, no me entierren vivo!*, directed by Efraín Gutiérrez (1976; Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), DVD.

conspicuous. However, as Faz suggested, those who worked with her know how prominent her role was. Peña puts it well when he says:

> We didn't know any more than she did when we started… whatever we learned she learned at the same time, maybe even more… It wasn't like she was a tag-along, you know… a pretty face or anything like that. She is, but… She worked right beside us, she struggled, she overcame and she succeeded. And so if anything else, you wanna give her credit. I mean, to me, she's a filmmaker. People say, "Well how come you don't call yourself a director?" I say, "Well, I don't. I'm a filmmaker because I do a little bit of everything…" That's the way I see her and Sabino, as filmmakers, because whatever was asked of her, she did it. She ran the camera, she produced, when Efraín wasn't up to it one hundred percent to kind of tow the line with the actors, stuff like that… She deserved it. She deserves credit.[77]

Conclusion

Whether or not Faz's projects without Gutiérrez came to fruition or attained "recognition," her intentions and uses of film must be considered on their own terms. The films the couple worked on together were surely significant to both Gutiérrez and Faz for some similar and some different reasons. Not only can these histories co-exist, but they are interdependent. To separate the two is to construct artificial boundaries in a tradition of historical writing that is increasingly being questioned.

Faz remembered her years with Gutiérrez fondly, saying, "I think that if we wouldn't have had a relationship we could have continued [with filmmaking], because… we were a very good team."[78] Without their personal relationship, however, their professional partnership would likely never have happened. Her personal life with Gutiérrez was what facilitated Faz's entrance onto the filmmaking scene and into film history, but that fact should not obscure her efforts as a film pioneer during the 1970s. Opportunities for Latinas to make feature films have certainly

[77] Peña, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[78] Faz, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, January 15, 2008.

changed somewhat since Faz made her mark as one of the first Latinas to work on any U.S. feature, but male-centered notions of Chicano film history, lack of attention to women's place in (film) history, and in many cases, women's decisions to prioritize their romantic relationships and families over their careers continue to result in a dearth of print media that documents how Latinas contribute to the making of feature films and the manner in which they transform the way films are being made in the United States. The following case study of Elizabeth Avellán's career is yet another such example, but explores the present-day possibilities for Latinas in feature filmmaking, as developed through her professional/personal partnership with Robert Rodríguez, one of the few Chicano filmmakers working in Hollywood, today. Where Faz is an early example of accessing the means of production through independent, regional cinema, Avellán's career illustrates the ways in which some Latina producers who have now established themselves in Hollywood have been able to become agents of change in an industry that continually resists any deviation from the status quo.

Chapter Three

Elizabeth Avellán: Producing an Army of Troublemakers

The previous chapter, devoted to a case study of Chicana filmmaker Josey Faz's career described Faz as someone who refused to "push" herself into the limelight. Austin-based filmmaker Elizabeth Avellán, who also began her filmmaking career side-by-side with her romantic partner/husband-to-be,[1] Robert Rodriguez, has been similarly described. Publicist/ producer Sandra Condito has said Avellán does not "push herself in front of people," explaining that may be partially to blame for her failure to receive the kind of recognition one might expect one of the most successful Latina producers in the U.S. to receive. However, Avellán, like Faz, follows in the tradition of many Latin American women filmmakers who have worked on films with their husbands since the early years of the industry, while receiving minimal credit for their work.[2]

Although Rodriguez has a reputation for being a self-taught auteur involved with virtually every aspect of his films,[3] the press has consistently noted his collaborative efforts with filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and Carlos Gallardo.[4] Avellán's status as the most

[1] Rodriguez and Avellán were married for 16 years, separated in 2006, and subsequently divorced.

[2] Melissa Fitch, *Side Dishes: Latin American Women, Sex, and Cultural Production* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 111-112. Fitch discusses Luis Trelles Plazaola's *Cine y mujer en América Latina: Direcotras de largometrajes de ficción*, which documents that many Latin American women have worked in partnerships with their husbands since the beginning of the film industry. Plazaola shows that because being listed in film credits has traditionally been considered "unfeminine," male partners often received credit for the work, while the women receive none.

[3] See, for example, Joe Nick Patoski, "The Power Couple: Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán," *Texas Monthly* vol. 26, iss. 5, May 1998, 108+.

[4] Tarantino and Rodriguez became close friends early in their careers, after having met on the film festival circuit. They have worked together on *Four Rooms* (1995), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) and *Grindhouse* (2007), and Tarantino was also a guest director on Rodriguez's *Sin City* (2005), as well as an actor in *Desperado* (1995). Rodriguez and Gallardo were high school friends and made *El Mariachi* (1993) together. Gallardo was also a co-producer on *Desperado*, and a producer on *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003), and he made a cameo in

consistent partner of all, however, is often undervalued, if recognized at all. Avellán did become much more visible in 2006, during the filming of *Grindhouse* (2007), when Rodriguez had an affair with the leading lady, Rose McGowan, who starred in his segment of the film, *Planet Terror*.[5] Rodriguez's betrayal of his wife and mother of his five children was, not surprisingly, a scandal that made headlines across the internet, tabloids, and every other media outlet imaginable. The attention Avellán's personal life received coincided with an increase in attention to her professional life (though her recognition does remain limited).

The increased recognition Avellán has received for her efforts over the past several years has been particularly strong within the Austin/Texas film community, where she operates and co-owns Troublemaker Studios with Rodriguez. In 2007, Austin Film Society (AFS) awarded Avellán the Texas Film Hall of Fame "Ann Richards Award," named for the former Governor of Texas, who was well known for supporting the interests of women and minorities during her tenure. Fittingly, the award is given to "a pathfinder who breaks barriers and is committed to bringing everyone to the table."[6] Louis Black, co-founder of *The Austin Chronicle* and the South by Southwest Festival (a music, film, and interactive media conference) was one of the talent chairs responsible for selecting Avellán for the award. He notes that when he and Evan Smith, who was then the editor of *Texas Monthly*, established the Texas Film Hall of Fame in 2001, they intended to honor local filmmakers such as Avellán, Rodriguez, Richard Linklater, and Mike Judge. They were not honored immediately, in order to establish that the AFS was not

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Grindhouse and starred in *Curandero* (2005), which was written (but not directed) by Rodriguez. After their initial success with *El Mariachi*, attention to Gallardo declined as Rodriguez began to work more independently.

[5] *Grindhouse* was a double feature consisting of two full-length feature films: 1) *Planet Terror,* which was written and directed by Rodriguez, and 2) *Death Proof*, which was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino.

[6] *2007 Texas Film Hall of Fame Awards: A Tribute to Ann Richards* (Austin, TX: Austin Film Society, March 9, 2007), DVD.

biased towards Austin's homegrown talent, but rather was "honest" and "serious" about what they were doing. Furthermore, Black explains by the time they decided to honor Avellán, they wanted to be sure they had honored a sufficient number of highly regarded individuals to make it "clear to Elizabeth that she belongs in this company of great people."[7] The following year, Avellán also received recognition from *Texas Monthly* when they published "35 People Who Will Shape Our Future," and identified her as being, "as close to a true Hollywood power player as we have in our midst."[8]

While national recognition of Avellán's work continues to be limited, *Hispanic* did include her as a recipient of their "Latinas of Excellence" awards in the entertainment category in 2007,[9] a rare instance of her recognition on a national level. That same year, *The Hollywood Reporter* named Rodriguez third on their "Latino Power 50" list, while Avellán did not appear in the list, nor did Rodriguez's entry mention her as someone significant to her then-husband's success. Interestingly, actor/producer Salma Hayek was fourth from the top on this same list, her star status clearly contributing to her recognition despite the fact she had made only a fraction of the films Avellán had made.[10]

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[7] Louis Black, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas, February 7, 2012. By the time Avellán was honored in 2007, notable members of the film community such as Jack Valenti (Motion Picture Association of America), Owen Wilson (actor), Liz Smith (*Daily Variety* columnist), Tobe Hooper (director), Forest Whitaker (actor/producer), and Robert Rodriguez (writer/director/producer), had already been inducted into the Texas Film Hall of Fame. For a full list of honorees, see: "Texas Film Hall of Fame Awards – Honorees Gallery," Austin Film Society, accessed February 7, 2012, http://www.austinfilm.org/page.aspx?pid=744.

[8] "35 People Who Will Shape Our Future," *Texas Monthly*, February 2008, 06.

[9] Idy Fernandez, "Hispanic Magazine's Latinas of Excellence 2007," *Hispanic*, May 2007, 47.

[10] In contrast to the almost 20 films (most of which had been commercial successes) for which Avellán had received some kind of producing credit, Hayek had worked on four projects at this point. Hayek served as executive producer and senior executive producer on two of *Showtime*'s made-for-television movies (*In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001) and *The Maldonado Miracle* (2003), respectively). She directed *The Maldonado Miracle*, as well. She was also the producer of the hugely successful film *Frida* (2002) and executive producer on the ABC television series,

The following case study of Avellán's career, her partnership with Rodriguez, and the projects she has worked on independent from him aims to further illustrate the ways in which romantic/professional collaborations between producers/directors, initiated in the analysis of Faz and Gutiérrez's partnership, can both hinder and enable Latina filmmakers' success. It also highlights what Avellán's close friend and colleague Rana Joy Glickman calls the different "currencies" in which producers deal, documenting ways in which generosity of both resources and spirit can produce unexpected rewards through the mobilization of personal relationships and networks in the service of their film productions. This case study of Avellán, a Venezuelan-born filmmaker who maintains strong connections to her home country, also illuminates the transnational dimension exemplary of many Latina filmmakers working in the U.S., today.

Avellán is best known for her work with Rodriguez, one of the most successful Chicano filmmakers working in Hollywood today. Avellán also produces films (industrial and otherwise) directed by other filmmakers, across multiple genres for international audiences. She is the only woman who has produced Latin-themed films with Latina/o actors, for English speaking audiences in the U.S. which break $100 million.[11] She is also making smaller films that ensure emerging voices be heard. Avellán serves as a mentor to many young filmmakers and believes "the world wants to hear new voices, new forms even in mainstream cinema."[12] Locating agents of change such as Avellán and a small number of producers like her who are steadily garnering the power to change the shape of the industry and the availability of diverse images to which audiences have access in the United States is essential for Latinas/os and other underrepresented

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Ugly Betty (2006-2010). Hayek's career will be explored in more detail, as an example of the star-as-producer phenomenon, in chapter five of this study.

[11] Whitney Joiner, "The Marriage Is Over, but the Show Goes On," *New York Times*, September 30, 2007, 12.

[12] Laura Tillman, "SXSW Panel: Latino Cinema Knows No Boundaries," *The Brownsville Herald*, March 10, 2008, accessed November 16, 2011, http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/panel-85090-knows-south.html.

populations. It is particularly important should they hope to find their experiences depicted in more diverse and accurate ways. Avellán's films are a testament to her commitment to underrepresented populations, as are the films and careers of the filmmakers she has mentored over the years.

The Distance from the Page to the Screen

A screenplay, of course, is one of the many creative elements of filmmaking that producers must negotiate. The documentary film *Tales from the Script*[13] investigates the work that screenwriters do through interviews with several prominent screenwriters. With regard to the way that various individuals review and alter their original scripts, screenwriters such as Ron Shelton, Andrew W. Marlowe, and Marc Fergus note that there are certainly times when the creative input of others results in valuable improvements to their work. One of the recurring themes throughout the film, however, is the ways in which screenwriters often feel their scripts are taken apart, rearranged, modified, and put back together throughout the filmmaking process, in ways that often result in what they consider "worse" than what they either envisioned or felt they originally put on the page. Whether for better or worse, Jane Anderson, in the companion book by the same name, explains, "A film script is deconstructed and melted down and shattered into a million pieces, then put back together again. The effect of a movie is as dependent on the cameraman, the sound man, the editor, and the director as it is on the writing."[14]

There are two important things to take away from this discussion of moving the story from the page to the screen. The first thing to note is the distinction between the screenplay,

[13] *Tales from the Script*, directed by Peter Hanson (New York, NY: First Run Features, 2010), DVD.

[14] Peter Hanson and Paul Robert Herman, ed., *Tales from the Script: 50 Hollywood Screenwriters Share Their Stories* (New York: itbooks, 2010), 36.

which is a creative product, and the actual film. Screenplays can be conceptualized both as a blueprint[15] for the film, which will necessarily be interpreted in order for the story to make it to film, and also as a finished product, a piece of writing which can be read and experienced as a story, in and of itself. In the documentary, *Tales from the Script*, John August explains that as a screenwriter, he feels fortunate that after writing a screenplay he is left with a finished product of which he can be proud, whether or not it ever gets made into a film. He distinguishes the writer from the director because the latter "doesn't have anything unless somebody gives him permission to make a movie. A writer can at least always write a script and that's sort of the one great luxury we have, is you know, words are cheap."[16] August's comments make clear that the screenplay, a product of artistic creation, is also a tool used to create a film, which is a distinct, but related creation in and of itself. Screenwriters, involved in stage one, and sometimes two or even three, of Patrick Hogan's creative process (of making a film, in this case), which was discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, witness their ideas morph as more and more people become involved with bringing their words to life on the big screen.

In many instances, screenwriters do collaborate with producers, directors, studio executives, and any number of people, as they incorporate the notes they are given by many people who become involved in the process. They may make modifications in order to facilitate the new "vision" that is developing. In other instances, writers may not be consulted and it may be that other writers are brought onto the project in order to change their work. Dennis Palumbo laments that the screenwriter, as "the originator of the material, from the moment everyone else claims to love it, is then the subject of an attempt to remove them from the material as much as

[15] Ibid., 4. See John D. Brancato's entry for one example of the analogy of script to blueprint, which is a common one.

[16] *Tales from the Script*, directed by Peter Hanson.

possible."[17] In situations such as these, the term "collaboration" proves to be inadequate to describe the process of filmmaking. Screenwriters might have an initial vision of the film they hope will be made. They may or may not be consulted on how their visions are executed, and they may or may not agree with the direction other filmmakers take their material. Once the director becomes involved, the way he or she interprets the screenwriter's vision and, in turn, develops his or her own can also be subject to manipulation by studio executives, actors, or any number of other people. Once a director becomes involved in the project, the challenge is to rally the various people involved in executing the director's vision around a common understanding of what that vision is, as well as to agree upon what the best way to arrive at the final goal is. As director Nimrod Antal notes in relation to *Predators* (2010), which was produced by Avellán and Rodriguez's Troublemaker Studios:

> If you can envision it and you're fortunate enough to have talented people around you to help make that happen and you're able to communicate that idea to those people, then you're ok. There's a lot, a lot of people involved in the process….[18]

Antal notes that while a director may have a particular vision, they must enlist the assistance of other talented individuals in order to bring that vision to fruition, and it is virtually impossible for him or her to execute all the tasks necessary even if he or she does much more than just direct, as Rodriguez does. Even Rodriguez, who champions doing a little bit of everything, claiming that "although filmmaking is known as a collaborative art, it doesn't have to be," acknowledges that

[17] Hanson, *Tales from the Script*.

[18] "Predators world premiere red carpet interviews part II: director Nimrod Antal and Adrien Brody," interview by Mark Walters of Bigfanboy.com, July 7, 2010, accessed October 28, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ON69767b_TE.

once a film involves large amounts of equipment and big budgets, "a film crew comes in real handy."[19]

In the same way that the director often gets credit for the success of a film, s/he can also bear the brunt of criticism for its failure, despite the volume of other people who have contributed to a film and the number of obstacles, some insurmountable, that may have been out of their control. Rodriguez chooses to take responsibility for as many aspects of his films as possible, which minimizes both the possibility of attributing failure, as well as success of the films, to other individuals who work on them. Responsibility for the success or failure of a film, in fact, rarely lies with an individual. Rather, it is the result of the way that industrial, financial, interpersonal and creative factors come together at the historical moment in which it is made. The authorship of the film is shared, and while it may involve collaboration among artists at various points in the production, films are not generally the result of collaboration at every moment in the process.

Films are, however, the result of bringing together the key elements and individuals needed to turn words into image and motion. Unlike a visual artist, such as a painter or sculptor who is most often solely responsible for honing his or her craft in order to create a physical work of art, a director must communicate his or her vision to others who must execute that vision. Part of a director's success as an artist depends upon his or her ability to access other filmmakers whose talents suit the needs of the artwork, as well as their own ability to communicate their vision to those individuals who will be executing the tasks involved in creating the final artwork/film. How similar all artists' understanding of that vision are and how committed they are to that vision can also fall within a wide continuum of artistic visions. How satisfied each

[19] Robert Rodriguez, *Rebel Without a Crew: Or How a 23-Year Old with $7,000 Became a Hollywood Player* (New York: Plume, 1996), 201.

artist is with how closely the final product adheres to their understanding of the vision and how well their talents were utilized to execute that vision also vary tremendously.

Like the director, the producer is key to coordinating the various contributions necessary to make a finished film. In his discussion of directors and actors and their partial contributions to the whole film, Johanes Riis acknowledges the significance of coordination, but says that "it does not follow that the coordinator can claim authorship of partial contributions, as if they are necessarily subsumed and diffused under the agency of the author-director. We may consider values at the level of the whole as the result of an accumulation of valuable contributions."[20] While it is true that coordination cannot be equated with authorship, I argue that 1) the director's role is not dissimilar to that of the producer, in that he/she is also organizing and coordinating resources (props, cameras, lights, etc.) and talents (of actors, cinematographers, editors, etc.) in order to create something which he/she has not physically created, and 2) like directors, producers do more than coordinate, making critical, creative contributions as they negotiate and coordinate various resources in order to bring a script to life. Both producers and directors coordinate tangible and intangible resources in the service of transforming an abstract idea into a moving image.

Negotiating the creative and logistical aspects of making a film requires a creative approach to problem solving, as well as a keen understanding of both the creative and practical elements of making a film work. As Avellán notes, if one element of a film fails, the entire film can fall apart.[21] There are numerous feedback mechanisms in place, which range from formal

[20] Johannes Riis, "Can Involuntary Contributions Be Authored?: A Note on the Actor's Art," in *Visual Authorship: Creativity and Intentionality in Media*, ed. Torben Grodal, Bente Larsen, and Iben Thorving Laursen (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 97.

[21] Elizabeth Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas, November 16, 2011.

processes such as giving notes on scripts, to more informal ones such as spontaneously deciding on the best way to create a special effect on set. The function of these processes is to keep a film as cohesive as possible. Producers are key figures as problem solvers, and as I will show, they are often responsible for providing the creative options from which directors have to choose in order to achieve their desired effects. Feedback mechanisms and creative problem solving are at play from the origination of the idea for a film, through its development, production, and post-production, including the distribution and marketing campaigns that aim to find the best way to reach an audience.[22]

Creative Analysis – It's in the Blood and in the Balance

In relation to Avellán and her role at Troublemaker Studios, Charles Ramírez-Berg has emphasized the difficulty of the job that producers do. Producers "hold together" the creative and commercial worlds involved in filmmaking, which often have different goals. This pressure often makes for tense and potentially explosive work environments, but at Troublemaker Studios, Ramírez-Berg notes that Rodriguez and Avellán are able to:

> draw the best out from everyone and it's by design. They lead by example. They lead with respect. Everybody is working hard because they know that Robert and Elizabeth are working even harder.[23]

As Ramírez-Berg notes, it is not uncommon for movie sets to be populated with large egos and short tempers. In these situations, again, the word "collaboration" can be an inaccurate

[22] See Alejandro Pardo, "El productor del cine," *Nickel Odeon* n. 28 (otoño [Fall] 2002): 224-230, for an excellent discussion of the multiplicity of tasks to which producers must attend, the wide variety of functions with which they must be familiar, and the complexity and creativity involved in the work that they do.

[23] "9th Annual, ¡A Viva Voz! – Machetes, Mariachis, and Spy Kids: Elizabeth Avellán Makes Movies (2/6)," April 7, 2011, The Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, accessed August 1, 2011, http://vimeo.com/26785139.

way to describe large numbers of people who physically work together but, in many ways, may have very distinct goals. Avellán does not use threats or intimidation to solicit the desired result from her cast and crew. As Glickman sees it, Avellán's "governance is in the domain of human dynamics."[24] She has earned the respect of her colleagues and community, is admired and well-liked by virtually everyone with whom she comes into contact.[25] Further, she has steadily built a network of allies whom she can enlist to work towards her goals and those of her directors. In addition, she has an ability to maintain a balance between creative and analytical interests, as well as her business and personal goals, which is a skill that has proved invaluable in terms of filmmaking (although it was not how she initially envisioned utilizing these specific talents). In terms of locating the strengths that are most valuable to her as a producer, Glickman indicates, "You can't leave a critical ingredient out."[26] Much like a film, it is the particular combination of ingredients that makes her the exceptional filmmaker that she is.

Family Background

Avellán was born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1960, into a family heavily involved in the Venezuelan radio and television industries. Simply put, Avellán says, "It's in the blood."[27] Her maternal grandfather, Gonzalo Veloz Mancera, was a Venezuelan radio and television pioneer.[28]

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[24] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Los Angeles, California, September 28, 2011.

[25] There is abundant evidence with regard to this fact. For two examples, see Alison Macor, *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids: Thirty Years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 116; Patoski, "The Power Couple."

[26] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, September 28, 2011.

[27] Michael King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán on Venezuela's Surprise Hit," *The Austin Chronicle*, October 28, 2005.

[28] Gonzalo Veloz Mancera was founder of the first privately owned television station, Televisa, as well owner of several radio stations in Caracas. Ann Hornaday explains that Avellán's "maternal grandfather founded Venezuela's

Her uncle, Gonzalo "Chile" Veloz, is a famous deejay, as well as the voice of Cinemax and HBO in Venezuela. He is what Avellán refers to as the "Latin American Mel Blanc" (Mel Blanc being a voice actor in the United States, most famous for his work as the voice of Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, and a variety of other Warner Bros. cartoon characters). All of Avellán's uncles had deejay licenses in Venezuela, as did her mother, Norah Veloz. Before she married, Avellán's mother also had two television programs of her own, one of which Avellán indicates was a cooking show, the other addressing issues related to health and children, relevant to mothers. Avellán describes her mother as a social worker of sorts, but notes that she gave that life up in order to have a family.[29]

Although Avellán was early exposed to the inner workings of mass media/entertainment, she was not encouraged to become involved in the industry. Although her father, Joaquín Avellán, loved taking his family to see the movies, he was very much against the lifestyle associated with show business and all its trappings. However, when Avellán and her family moved to Houston, Texas in 1974, her interest in entertainment media grew. She was immediately struck by the freedom of expression on television and recalls learning English by watching the programs *Sesame Street* (1969 -) and *The Tonight Show* (1962-1992), which starred Johnny Carson. She notes, "I was obsessed with Johnny Carson because in his monologue he would do the same kind of things that my grandfather would do." Avellán remembers her grandfather routinely made jokes about the Venezuelan government on his radio program, *El pitazo de las doce/ The Noon Whistle*. Consequently, the men in her family were

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broadcast television system in the 1940s." See Ann Hornaday, "For Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán, Every Movie is a Family Film," *The Washington Post,* September 15, 2003, C01.

[29] Elizabeth Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Austin, Texas, October 10, 2011.

routinely arrested and taken to prison. Avellán was impressed that there were no consequences for Carson's critique of the government, as there had been for her family in Venezuela.

Despite her interest in film and television, and the creative leanings she inherited from her mother's side of the family, Avellán early exhibited potential to excel in more analytical endeavors, the domain of the paternal side of her family who were very "cerebral" and included a large number of engineers. Avellán was mentored by intellectuals of the highest caliber. She remembers, for example, sitting side by side with her father's friend, world-renowned architect, Gio Ponti, as he created furniture designs for her father's furniture factory while visiting the family home. Ponti encouraged Avellán to study architecture, which she pursued at Rice University, combining her creative and analytical talents. However, Avellán says she was not convinced architecture was the right career for her.

Recognizing Talent in Others

Avellán excelled at technical drawing, and in fact, had won drafting awards in high school. Although her technical drawings at Rice were good, Avellán says in order to be a "top dog in architecture, you have to be a designer," and she did not see a future for herself as a designer. She did, however, recognize talent in others. Out of the twenty students in her sophomore class at Rice, she recognized four "rock stars" she believed would become designers. Out of those four individuals, three, she says, are now at the top of their field. Even at Rice, she was drawn to hyper creative people and was inclined to support them. She remembers assisting the creative architecture students with their technical drawings on numerous occasions because she was fast and because she was good at what she did.

Avellán says her uncanny ability to recognize talent became evident to her early in life, first in entertainment rather than architecture. When she first came to the United States, she was a TV-holic. She remembers, "I could pick, almost… ALMOST [Avellán's emphasis] one hundred percent of the time which pilots were gonna become TV shows and which weren't."[30] She says she even kept track of her predictions, because she felt perhaps she was giving herself more credit than she deserved. She documented what she describes as an "understanding of what the American public might want," which she recognized was a talent her siblings did not share. Avellán has an ability to recognize both media content that will satisfy audiences' desires, as well as talented people who can create that content. While she does see herself as a creative person, she possesses both creative and analytical skills and recognizes her own greatest strength as supporting other creative people.

In her sophomore year of college, before she was supposed to move to Milan to study for her preceptorship under Ponti, the famous architect died. Avellán decided not to pursue her architecture degree, and remembers that not long after that, her mother asked her what she would do with her life if her family's opinions were not a factor in her decision. She responded she would probably be a producer, although she was unsure if she would prefer news, television, or film. No matter, her mother replied, "Oh honey that's too hard to do. Don't even try to do that."[31]

At that moment, Avellán was aware of her desire to be a producer of some kind, but felt her life pulling her in a different direction. She married her college sweetheart and had her first child, Aaron Burns (who is now a young filmmaker whom she mentors). Avellán raised her family and worked as an assistant to the ear, nose and throat doctors in a doctors' office at Baylor College, where she provided tremendous support and took on more responsibility than

[30] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[31] Ibid.

was associated with her job. She explains that the doctors for whom she worked often needed illustrations in less time than what the Baylor illustration department could provide. She began working overtime, creating illustrations and slides in less time and for less money than the illustration department could provide. Avellán remembers that as with so many jobs she has had, "Even though I might be the little receptionist, they would realize they could give me other stuff to handle and it was always like a project…. I had to get information from everybody, put it together, and it ended up being a project." She worked at Baylor for five years.

In 1986, Avellán moved to Austin, Texas, with her first husband and their son, but the couple soon separated. Avellán's propensity for administration led her to take a position as an Administrative Associate for the Executive Vice President and Provost, Gerhard Fonken, at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). Again, she found herself organizing, collecting, and coordinating information that would become a "project," and she gained a significant amount of experience dealing with budgets during this time. Initially, she had aspirations of becoming the Vice President of the University.[32] While her career goal was unrelated to filmmaking at that time, her personal interest in the medium continued to grow.

It was a few months before she met Rodriguez that Avellán recognized the possibility of bringing her interest in administration and film together. She remembers a pivotal moment, while watching *Broadcast News* (1987), when she realized her knowledge base, combined with her ability to work well under pressure and juggle multiple tasks would lend itself to the job that Holly Hunter's character performed in the film.[33] The very talents she recognized in herself as making her an ideal candidate for an administrative position in academia, namely her gift for

[32] Elise Ballard, *Epiphany: True Stories of Sudden Insight to Inspire, Encourage, and Transform* (New York: Harmony Books, 2011), 104.

[33] Joiner, "The Marriage is over."

budgets and people, could be applied to her passion for film. Being good with budgets and people are, as she sees it, "perfect" for film production.

The Couple that Creates Together… Goes to Hollywood

Although she was becoming increasingly aware that she was well suited to being a producer of some sort, Avellán was still not pursuing a career in the field when she met Rodriguez, who was working as her file clerk at UT in 1988. At that time, Avellán was planning to finish her undergraduate degree and was preparing for the GRE so that she could then return to school to pursue a Ph.D. The couple dated for a year and a half and married in 1990, but their personal relationship was also a professional one from the very beginning.

Avellán and Rodriguez immediately found they shared a love of film, although they envisioned their involvement with the medium in very different ways. Neither of them had any professional experience, but Rodriguez had tremendous talent and had been teaching himself to make and edit films with fairly rudimentary tools, such as a super 8 camera and an editing system which consisted of two VCRs, since he was 13 years old.[34] Rodriguez is celebrated as a well-rounded filmmaker involved in virtually every aspect of the filmmaking process, including, but not limited to, writing, directing, cinematography, editing, visual effects, music, and producing. Avellán has been one of his biggest champions since the two met.

As she explains it, they spent their first date watching several of Rodriguez's short films. She admired his creativity and "wanted to do whatever [she] could to help him realize his dream."[35] Avellán remembers that after seeing the first of his films, she thought, "He is Spielberg

[34] Rodriguez, *Rebel Without a Crew*, viii-ix.

[35] Patoski, "The Power Couple."

in the making!"[36] She immediately asked to see more of his work and asked what his plans were, thinking of the possibilities with film festivals, which were thriving at the time. She pushed him to gather a few of his films together to submit to the Third Coast Film and Video Festival, but Rodriguez resisted, protesting that he simply did not have the time. She says, "Even that morning, I picked up the phone, and I said, 'Robert, the deadline is at 5, today… Get your ass out of bed.' I said, 'Do you really not have three little things you can put together?'" Rodriguez was able to put three of his films together and submitted them as *Austin Stories*. As Alison Macor notes, "Even before she began working as his producer, the organized and efficient Avellán pushed her new husband to get his work seen."[37]

Austin Stories was a huge hit, and was highly praised by judges Louis Black and Warren Skaaren (a successful Hollywood film producer/screenwriter). Rodriguez's success at the Third Coast Film and Video Festival secured him access to film production courses,[38] taught in the highly competitive Radio/Television/Film (RTF) program at UT, to which he had previously been unable to secure admission because of his low grade point average. What Rodriguez sought, however, was not access in terms of training in storytelling or technique, but rather to the department's filmmaking equipment.[39] Most festivals, at that time, accepted only work that was shot on film, and Rodriguez realized that he needed access to better equipment than what he had been using.

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[36] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[37] Alison Macor, *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids: Thirty Years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 119.

[38] Avellán's persistence with regard to Rodriguez's film festival submissions, as well as Rodriguez's success with *Austin Stories* is also corroborated by Ann Hornaday's article, "For Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán, Every Movie is a Family Film."

[39] Rodriguez, *Rebel Without a Crew*, xii.

Rodriguez next made his student film, *Bedhead* (1991), for approximately $800, using resources that were readily available to him (his siblings were his actors, and their toys, such as bicycles and skateboards, were his props). He says, "All of these things are featured prominently in the movie, along with a lot of creativity and lightning-fast storytelling techniques I had learned through all those little home movies I had made over the years."[40] Avellán was also key to the production of this short film, which earned him so much recognition.

Her crucial role from the beginning of Rodriguez's career gets los even in accounts sympathetic to Avellán's significant contributions. Even Alison Macor's book-length study of the Texas film industry, *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids: 30 Years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas*, which is by far the most substantial account of Avellán's contributions as part of Rodriguez's filmmaking team, downplays the significance of Avellán's early contributions to films such as *Bedhead*. Macor does make it clear that Avellán is a significant force in the couple's success and highlights Avellán as a power player in the Texas film industry. However, when she recounts Carlos Gallardo's thoughts about his relationship with Rodriguez on *El Mariachi* (1992),[41] which he explains as working "because [Rodriguez] was very technical, and I was the other side," Macor indicates that Gallardo's and Rodriguez's partnership "would be mirrored in the working relationship Rodriguez and Avellán created years later."[42] It was not years later that this working relationship developed. It seems curious that Macor should characterize Avellán's participation as having joined her husband once his career was well

[40] Ibid., xiii.

[41] *El Mariachi*, directed by Robert Rodriguez (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1992). Gallardo is the protagonist of the film, as well as a producer, and he is routinely acknowledged as Rodriguez's creative partner on the project.

[42] Macor, *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids*, 117.

underway. For, as the following description of Avellán's involvement in the making of *Bedhead* illustrates, she was heavily involved in Rodriguez's filmmaking process, even before *El Mariachi*. It was not as if she joined Rodriguez on his journey, once his career had taken off. She helped to make it happen.

Problem Solving with Pennies

By 1990, Avellán and Rodriguez were married and living off very meager wages. As Avellán remembers, she was bringing home approximately $1000, while Rodriguez earned somewhere in the neighborhood of $200-$300 per month. Avellán says the couple's income went largely to art supplies and expenses related to the making of Rodriguez's films and cartoons.[43] The $800 film, *Bedhead*, which accounted for about 2/3 or their monthly income, was clearly a sacrifice for the couple. Rodriguez's filmmaking endeavors became a joint business venture due to Avellán's crucial input. She says:

> So here we are, making so little money. And I remember the first year I had to pay taxes. And I'm like, "How the hell is it I'm paying $300 in taxes when everything is spent as a business expense? Everything! We don't do anything fun. Fun is our work." You know? And we're buying art supplies. We're buying all of this crap and we had to pay taxes? What the hell? So I literally told [Robert], "Go down to the courthouse and get, you know, a DBA. Register the name so we at least can write off this stuff. You know, this is killing us."

Thus, Los Hooligans Productions was born.

Avellán is formally credited as an animator on *Bedhead* and in the end credits she is included in the "special thanks," which read, "and of course, Elizabeth Avellán." Avellán

[43] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas. Rodriguez had a comic strip called, "Los Hooligans," while at UT Austin, and Avellán remembers the art supplies, and even gasoline used to deliver the artwork, were business expenses that the couple absorbed.

remembers staying up very late to help Rodriguez with the animated sequence of the film. She remembers working on the cockroach at the beginning of the short, in order to meet a deadline to enter the film in a student festival. By this time, Avellán had returned to school with the intent of finishing her degree and she was commuting back and forth between Houston and Austin while holding down her job at UT. She recalls that on this particular night, she had to put aside studying for her final exams in order to help Rodriguez finish the film on time. She put her drawing skills to use and remembers that when Rodriguez did not have an animation camera to create the animated sequence, it was she who suggested that they try to create the effect with a regular camera. She told him, "'Try it with the camera…. Let's do a test.' It worked."[44]

She also recalls coming up with an inexpensive solution for the dummy for the film, which they could not afford. Avellán suggested that instead of using a real dummy for the scene in which the protagonist, David, is dragged behind his sister's bicycle, they make a substitute out of nylons. Avellán remembers having to convince Rodriguez that there was no need for an actual dummy, and says that she did the following:

> I bought a bunch of pantyhose legs, and we went and got some Poly-fil from Michael's, and I put together this dummy for him that he dressed up with his brothers. You know, it's hilarious! And he was like, "I need a dummy!" "No, you don't need a dummy… It'll sell! Trust me! With the clothes, so fast? It'll sell." Sure enough, it did.[45]

As these examples indicate, when Rodriguez encountered obstacles, Avellán contributed her own creative ideas as well as the logistical and financial assistance to overcome them. In Avellán, Rodriguez found a partner to compliment and nurture his talents. Since they first met, she has consistently fueled and enabled his work with all of the resources available to her. Not only does she offer physical skills and creative ideas, but her business sense has been key to

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

building the filmmaking machine that turns his ideas into a reality. She was instrumental in founding Los Hooligans Productions which would eventually become the hugely successful studio that is Troublemaker Studios today.

From Austin to Hollywood… and Back, Again

When Rodriguez began working on his first feature, *El Mariachi*, which he largely shot in Mexico with his childhood friend/fellow filmmaker, Carlos Gallardo, Avellán helped the pair by waiting for deliveries, taking phone calls and providing financial support (among other things). Gallardo funded his part of the film through the sale of a property in Mexico, while Rodriguez infamously earned several thousand dollars by checking himself into a research hospital for a month. Rodriguez had to take a leave of absence from his job during this time, but Avellán made sure that there would be no repercussions for him at work by making sure to do all his filing at night, so no one would miss him while he was gone. Essentially, she worked two jobs while Rodriguez was in the hospital and continued to fill in whenever necessary even after he returned. Avellán notes that Rodriguez also helped her on the job, when she was commuting to Rice to complete her Art History degree, and explains that he covered for her on occasions when she needed it as well. The couple was ambitious and helped each other towards both their individual and their common goals.

Avellán's education at Rice, though it was not specific to film, did help to prepare her for the filmmaking career that was many years in the making. For example, she worked with the Rice Players, an extra-curricular theater group at the University for many years. The experience she gained as a stage manager gave her a taste of what it was like to work behind the scenes. In addition, because film is housed within the art history department at Rice, Avellán says she was

able to take both film theory and production courses while she was finishing her degree. She had been pursuing her interest in film before Rodriguez entered her life and had not had the clarity of vision or drive to pursue a filmmaking career before meeting him, but when she and Rodriguez started to get to know each other, she says, "I realized here's one talented man and a very driven woman who understands him, and together we can do something. And we did."[46] She recognized when the conditions were right and made the decision to move forward with a dream, and she did so in a way that made practical sense.

El Mariachi, made on a miniscule budget of $7,000, did tremendously well on the festival circuit and earned Rodriguez a distribution deal with Columbia Pictures as well as an agent at ICM Talent Agency. Once *El Mariachi* began to get attention in Hollywood, Rodriguez made the decision to move to Los Angeles. Avellán was the only one with health insurance and so decided to stay in Austin while Rodriguez made the initial move. Avellán would visit L.A. on the weekends and continued to help in whatever way she could. She accompanied Rodriguez to numerous film festivals, which is where she began to make contacts and allies who would be instrumental to the couple's future filmmaking endeavors.[47]

Avellán says in 1992 she had to make a decision about whether or not she would commit to working with Rodriguez on his future films. She remembers it as a crossroads:

> It was a real soul-searching time for me because it meant spending a lot more time in L.A. It meant going into something that was so foreign. You know what I mean? And then… being the director's wife, which sucks… I knew I was gonna get, just… those kind of faces and those kind of attitudes. You know? Yucky!... And by the way, I'm one

[46] Ballard, *Epiphany: True Stories of Sudden Insight,* 104.

[47] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

> of those women that is very hard working, strong. I don't want to be that person. That was insulting, disgusting to me.[48]

An extremely spiritual person, Avellán fasted for 30 days and prayed for clarity as to whether or not this was the path she was to take in life. By May, she says the answer was clear: she was going to do it.

Avellán was attached to Rodriguez's next film, *Desperado* (1995)[49], as a possible producer (she and Gallardo were both co-producers on the film, while Rodriguez and Bill Borden share producing credit). However, the deal had been stalled and was not moving forward. She was still holding down her job at UT and assisting Rodriguez from Texas, which is why she had not been present and more involved on the set of *El Mariachi*. When Rodriguez secured membership to the Writer's Guild and thus gained access to insurance, Avellán was free to quit her job and move to Los Angeles which she did. The couple was fully invested in creating a space for themselves in the world of filmmaking together.

Because of the delayed deal on *Desperado*, Rodriguez took a job directing the film, *Roadracers* (1994), which was part of Showtime's "Rebel Highway" series. Avellán remembers that Rodriguez took the job largely because he admired producer, Debra Hill, who was producing all ten of the films in the series. Hill had produced *Escape from New York* (1981), a film directed by John Carpenter, who was an inspiration to Rodriguez.[50] Avellán says when Hill realized that

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[48] Ibid. Avellán notes that because she had been circulating among the filmmaking community, at festivals, parties, and various other events, she had both witnessed individuals riding the coattails of others, and heard the gossip about such individuals within the community. She remembers hearing people already involved in particular productions attempting to get their girlfriends producing credits, or hoping to get paid extraordinary amounts of money when they were hardly on the set and not working nearly as hard as the rest of the crew. Avellán cringed at the thought of being thought of as "the wife," benefiting from her husband's success without doing the work for which she might receive credit.

[49] *Desperado*, directed by Robert Rodriguez (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1995).

[50] It is interesting to note that Hill and the director of *Escape from New York*, John Carpenter, are yet an other example of a romantic/professional couple who made many films together, while the director retained the majority

not only did Avellán have aspirations of becoming a producer, but that she was intelligent and had experience with budgets and a number of other things that made her well-suited for the job, she invited her to sit in on the production meetings for the other "Rebel Highway" films with which Rodriguez was not involved. Avellán remembers Hill as her "first mentor,"[51] and says that when she expressed interest in taking a Master's class about "producing on the line," through the UCLA extension program, Hill made a phone call to help get her into the class.[52] Avellán also took a writing class designed for producers and says that both extension classes provided her with the academic training she felt she needed. Although she feels many businesses run in similar ways, the classes taught her about film structure and the "lingo" of the film world that she could not have taught herself.

Avellán was learning how to be a producer by both being in the classroom and by being at Hill's side, while Rodriguez was making *Roadracers* and learning how to work with a crew for the first time. Because he was not a trained filmmaker, Rodriguez was unfamiliar with many of the technical terms being used on the set, and the crew was reduced in order to make Rodriguez more comfortable. John Clark quotes Rodriguez about his perspective on the shoot: "People were pissed because they were used to having two assistants when you really don't need any…. I just ended up grabbing the camera, getting in the wheelchair, and shooting *Mariachi*-

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of the notoriety. Hill co-wrote and produced several of the films that make up what is generally thought of as Carpenter's best work, including the *Halloween* franchise, for example. The couple were married, but split in 1985. Hill was very successful in her own right – she produced *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987), *Big Top Pee-wee* (1988), and *The Fisher King* (1991), for example – and is a noted pioneer as a woman in the film industry. She does not, however, receive comparable credit for her efforts, outside of the business.

[51] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[52] Hill served as an advisor on the UCLA Extension Department of Entertainment Studies and Performing Arts' Producing-Development Advisory Board, and so was able to recommend that Avellán be admitted to the advanced class.

style."[53] Cinematographer Roberto Schaefer, Clark says, confessed that the crew was angered because in a *Los Angeles Times* interview, Rodriguez essentially claimed to have made *Roadracers* himself, which angered many people. Avellán's skills handling people would compliment Rodriguez's technical skills and creativity when dealing with casts and crew.

Clark's article, which appeared in *Premiere*, described the frenetic activity occurring at the Rodriguez (and Avellán) home. He indicated the home was an editing "'palace,' a rented split-level high in the hills of Brentwood, with a spectacular view of L.A. It's like a high-tech frat house: fast food in the kitchen, video monitors and cables everywhere else. He sleeps here, eats here, and works here, along with his sound and music editors." What escapes Clark and his readers is Avellán's role in the up and coming filmmaker's endeavors. Clark does briefly mention her, though not by name. He explains that Rodriguez's wife is pregnant and "scouting land for them to buy" in Austin. At the time the article was written, both Rodriguez and Avellán were hard at work, though it was only Rodriguez who was getting paid. As Clark notes, *Desperado* had already been completed and along with *Four Rooms* (1995) it was being cut in Rodriguez's (and Avellán's) home. *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) was in pre-production and Avellán had been working for next to nothing on all of the projects, particularly *Desperado* and *From Dusk Till Dawn*. When Clark says that Avellán was returning to Austin to purchase land, it was not simply to spend the money her husband was earning as a filmmaker in order to create a nest for her new family. She had left her busy schedule as a budding filmmaker in Los Angeles to purchase land for the couple to build their family and what would become a Texas film empire, the future Troublemaker Studios.

[53] John Clark, "Major League?" *Premiere*, September 1995, 77.

Learning the People and the Process

To more accurately describe Avellán's activities during the time Rodriguez was making *Roadracers* and shortly thereafter, *Desperado*, *Four Rooms*, and *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Avellán was learning (by working on some of the very same films) how to adapt her natural talents to the business of filmmaking, where she could put them to use to keep her cast and crew happy, among other things. As Glickman notes, to make a film:

> It takes an army. It takes a village. If you don't take care of your people you have nothing. Now, that's why the unions obviously came about, is because people weren't taking care of their people, so the unions formed and said, "Yo producers, yo studios, yo whoevs, like, you have to take care of your people." Elizabeth does not need to be told to take care of her people.[54]

Avellán's humanity is one of the greatest assets that make her so well suited to film producing, which involves interacting with and coordinating so many people. Part of what Rodriguez struggled with on the set of *Roadracers* was the fact that he is so multi-talented that he does not necessarily know how or want to share the responsibilities he shoulders. On small productions like *Bedhead* and *El Mariachi*, he had been able to maintain almost complete control over his films. Journalist Joe Patoski captures the sentiment perfectly when he quotes Rodriguez:

> "I always wanted to clone myself," Rodriguez says, nodding to his wife sitting across the table. "Since this was always a hobby, and it turned into work--it still doesn't feel like work--I want to do it all." Nice sentiment, but the reality is, when you're dealing with eight figure budgets and a staff and crew of more than a hundred, you can't do it all. The next best thing is Elizabeth.[55]

[54] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, September 28, 2011.

[55] Patoski, "The Power Couple," 109.

In a business where "money and time are the most precious resources,"[56] efficiency is key. For example, the reason that he scores many of his own films, Rodriguez explains, is that:

> a composer needs a couple of weeks just to get their heads into the material that you've worked on for years. And then they have only a few weeks to put out a score. There's no way I'm gonna like everything they turn over in that amount of time, and there isn't more time, that's just the way post-schedules are.[57]

The tight schedule applies to many aspects of filmmaking, and so one of the advantages of working with someone like Avellán, who he trusts and who understands him, is an increase in efficiency. Avellán has said that Rodriguez and she "trust each other. We don't need to confer all the time. We know."[58] Clearly, the close relationship the former couple share lends itself to Avellán's understanding of the director's vision, as well as a certain level of trust that Avellán is committed to furthering Rodriguez's vision. Bob Weinstein of Miramax, with whom the couple has had a tremendously fruitful partnership, has described the couple's relationship in the following way (overlooking the fact that Avellán does generate creative ideas, as the previous examples have shown): "Robert has all the ideas…But there wouldn't be any movie if it wasn't for Elizabeth. She's in charge of physically making everything that Robert imagines get done. It's the perfect symbiotic relationship."[59]

It is important to note that while Avellán has a certain amount of insight into Rodriguez's creative process, due to her personal relationship with him, she has also invested her time in

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[56] "9th Annual, ¡A Viva Voz! – Machetes, Mariachis, and Spy Kids: Elizabeth Avellán Makes Movies (2/6)."

[57] John Allina, "Triplets in Sin: Robert Rodriguez Multiplies 'Sin City's' Score," *Film Score Monthly* vol. 10, iss. 2, March-April 2005, 17.

[58] Patoski, "The Power Couple," 109.

[59] Hornaday, "For Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán, Every Movie is a Family Film."

learning about that process.[60] She explains that when she first began to work on film sets with Rodriguez, she was amazed by his creative process, as he easily moved from one creative thing (like drawing) to another (such as playing his guitar). She watched him learn to use the sound board and figure out where he needed to "sweeten" a particular note of a song, for example, and by doing this learned about his creative process. Avellán notes she invests this kind of emotional labor in all the directors with whom she works in order to cater to their particular process.

Getting an Education on the Set of *Desperado*

Avellán's understanding of people, very generally speaking, is essential to managing the enormous number of individuals involved in bringing Rodriguez's ideas to the screen. She has a propensity for administration, numbers, and people, but she had to learn how to adapt those skills to the film business. Once she had committed herself to pursuing a filmmaking career and joined the crew of *Desperado*, Avellán says she met Tony Mark, who received a unit production manager credit on the film, and he immediately embraced her on the project. She remembers that Mark was not resistant to the idea that she was "the wife" of the director, but rather, he recognized her spirituality as something special within the business. He asked her, "Why are you the way you are?," implying her sincerity and good nature were not the norm. She says about Mark, "He saw the notes I was taking and he literally brought me in, sat me down and said, 'Ok, I need to know what job experience you've had because you're not the average person that I've met in this town.'" Avellán's interactions with Mark, she says, helped her to realize that in fact, she was making the right decision to work in the film industry. She believed her role would be to provide a different kind of energy, what I would say is that element of humanity, for the cast and

[60] Macor also notes multiple occasions of Avellán's having "watched" Rodriguez work in *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids*.

crew of the projects on which she would work. Avellán explained her history to Mark and proposed the following to him:

> "I want to do the job and I want to be in every meeting that happens, in every decision that happens." I said, "but I don't want you to pay me a dime. And I will do the job all the way to post production. It's gonna be my education. So pay me nothing."[61]

Avellán notes that she learned a tremendous amount on the set of *Desperado*. The crew, she remembers, "were really generous with their information because they didn't feel their jobs were threatened in any way, shape, or form." Avellán says post production supervisor, Tamee Zimmerman[62] was also instrumental in helping her learn the ropes. As Clark notes, post-production of both *Desperado* and *Four Rooms* was being done in Avellán and Rodriguez's home, while Avellán was pregnant with their first child, Rocket. Avellán remembers learning a lot about editing at this point in time, as she even cut portions of both *Desperado* and *Four Rooms*.

From Dusk Till Dawn

On her next film, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Avellán remembers that again, she asked for very little monetary compensation (approximately $25,000) for the work she did from beginning to end.[63] She recalls that there were other producers on the project and she did not get credit for much of the work she did on the film (although she did receive a co-producer credit). She approached the film in the same way that she had *Desperado*, understanding it as part of her education. She told co-producer Paul Hellerman, "Paul, I want you to teach me. I want to be in

[61] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[62] Zimmerman's name was, at that time, Tamee Smith.

[63] Avellán remembers working on the film from February of 1995 to January of 1996.

every time you're working on budget… whatever you're working on.' And he took me at my word." Avellán also remembers managing the budget, making sure deadlines were met, learning about special effects, and again, tending to the physical film prints. She says, "I went with Tamee everywhere. Just to see you know where the lab was…. How do you deal with things at the lab? A lot of producers don't really take care of post-production."[64] Avellán says she remembers that as the January deadline approached, she was the one who was consistently attending to the post-production of the film. She remembers being the only producer at the stage while the film was being mixed and says she spent New Year's Eve at the stage with her new baby, Rocket, having champagne with the crew because they "had to finish this movie."

Running, Gunning, and Getting Nails Done – Women Making Films in Los Angeles

The commitment Avellán displayed in these endeavors exemplify of just how thorough she is about her job. The sense of "wholeness" Avellán has about her films is a result of both her natural ability with story and her creative sensibility, but it is also a result of her hard work and the investment she has made in learning about all aspects of what it takes to physically get a film on the screen. As Rodriguez describes her, she is a "workaholic" who rarely stops working, even when she is sick.[65] This work ethic is not only in her nature (as proven by her previous work and educational experiences) but has been key to earning the respect of others in the industry, who she suspected might, because of her relationship to Rodriguez, question her abilities and fail to take her seriously.

[64] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[65] Rodriguez, *Rebel Without a Crew*, 62.

Avellán notes that it is difficult for women to succeed in the film industry and that she did encounter resistance upon entering the business. She uses an example from early in her career, while working on *Desperado*, to illustrate the point. During the production of the film, she attended a meeting with Gary Martin who was President of Production Administration at Sony in 1995. While they now have a very good relationship, Avellán remembers that at the time, Martin did not care for her. Avellán says she was attempting to convince Martin of the need to remove a line producer who had been the source of many problems on the production from the post-production process. She suggested replacing him with Mark, who she felt was fully capable of handling the job. Martin felt Avellán did not understand the way the film business worked, and explained to her, "Honey, when you go to the beauty parlor, one person does your hair and another one does your nails." Avellán remembers that two female executives from Sony in the room, Lisa Henson and Stephanie Allain, [66] immediately came to her defense, and because they held executive positions above Martin, he was forced to abandon his argument.

Avellán says eventually Martin recognized how much she contributed on the set of *Desperado*. She was, after all, "the first one on set and last one to leave," [67] but she had to work quite hard to earn his respect. She says, however, that his attitude towards her has since changed and she does recognize there are certainly instances in which the wife of an actor or director comes in with aspirations of being a producer, but does not do the work associated with the position. To be clear, this phenomenon is not specific to women. Avellán indicates there are many people who simply know someone famous, or have family working on a movie, want to be

[66] Lisa Henson was, at the time, President of Columbia Pictures, which was owned by Sony. See Natalie Sherman, "Lisa M. Henson," *The Harvard Crimson,* June 04, 2007, accessed November 15, 2011, http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2007/6/4/lisa-m-henson-its-not-easy/.

[67] "9th Annual, ¡A Viva Voz! – Machetes, Mariachis, and Spy Kids: Elizabeth Avellán Makes Movies (4/6)," April 7, 2011, The Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, accessed August 1, 2011, http://vimeo.com/26806816.

involved in film productions, and end up riding the coattails of other very talented, hardworking people.[68] Women arevoften assumed to behave in this way. As Louis Black clarifies: "Nobody ever says, 'Wow, Elizabeth's really lucky she's riding on Robert's coattails.' There are people who might tell you that Robert is riding on Elizabeth's coattails, but nobody's ever gonna say… and Robert knows it."[69]

Avellán notes women have been some of her greatest allies in the business. Besides Hill, Henson, Allain, and Zimmerman, she also notes that Linda Obst,[70] Kim Cooper, and Jane Evans,[71] have been instrumental to her success. She believes having women executives as allies has been important to her career. They have not seen her as, "'Oh, the wife of the director.' [Their support] helps you to do your job. You feel trusted." Because these more experienced women have made their own paths into the industry and witnessed (and sometimes experienced, themselves) the gender discrimination that comes along with being the "wife" of another filmmaker, they have often been more apt to see beyond the stereotype and give her the opportunities and freedom necessary to do her job.

Glickman and Avellán both remember that shortly after she gained recognition for *Desperado* and *Four Rooms*, Avellán's curiosity about how other "creative camps" might work prompted her to join Glickman on her independent film, *Real Stories of the Donut Men* (1997), written and directed by Beeaje Quick. The amount of time and energy Glickman had invested in

[68] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[69] Black, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[70] "9th Annual, ¡A Viva Voz! – Machetes, Mariachis, and Spy Kids: Elizabeth Avellán Makes Movies (4/6)."

[71] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

the project by the time Avellán came on board to help finish the film "was unspeakable"[72] according to Glickman, and about half of the film had been shot.

Avellán says when she joined the production, the team was "running and gunning" with very little money.[73] The situation was reminiscent of *El Mariachi*, a production where her primary responsibilities had kept her off the set. Avellán enjoyed the opportunity to be involved in the making of an independent film, and immediately recognized Quick, who is known for his "aggressive irreverence,"[74] as one of the hyper creative types of people to whom she is drawn. Besides writing and directing the film, Quick also played the lead in *Real Stories of the Donut Men*, which Avellán says "was not easy." One of the things she brought to the project, which helped get the film done, was "the real maternal instinct because basically Beeaje needs a mom."[75] She gives an example from the mixing of the film, during which Quick insisted on changing what she considered an "inane" detail of the movie. He simply could not settle on how to change the film and so in the end, she says, every time Quick refused to make up his mind, she quietly stood behind him and steadily pinched his shoulder. Quick would respond, ""Ok, ok, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine!"

Avellán is an admirer of Quick's incredible creativity but learned something valuable about filmmaking through her experience on *Real Stories of the Donut Men*. She acknowledges that while she is drawn to extremely creative individuals, creative minds do work very differently, which lead her to the conclusion that "there are certain things that you have to choose when you

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[72] Glickman, personal interview with Mirasol Riojas, October 7, 2011.

[73] Avellán, personal interview with Mirasol Riojas.

[74] Mark Ordesky, former president of Fine Line Features, is quoted as having described Quick in this way in Sara Catania's article, "'I'm Bullshitting as Fast as I Can': The Art and Artifice of Beeaje Quick."

[75] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

choose [a director]."

Avellán notes that working with Glickman and producer Pamela Cedarquist on this film was also a pleasure: "It was really fun working with two other women..." which she had not previously had an opportunity to do. She describes her own role on the film as being related to the logistics of completing the project, and the process, she says, was like helping Glickman to deliver a baby. She takes pride in having helped a friend finish a film "she couldn't let go of," and helped another friend Jacqueline Liebman complete *In and Out of Focus* (2002), which had similarly consumed many years of Liebman's life before Avellán became involved. Avellán notes there are occasions such as these in which she functions as "the finisher." In other instances, however, Avellán acts as fuel, putting things into motion, as illustrated by the instrumental role she played in bringing Rodriguez's work to the attention of the festival circuit and propelling his career forward, as well as her pivotal role in the making of *Secuestro Express* (2005),[76] which will be subsequently detailed.

Consistency as Proof of Sincerity – Building an Army of Troublemakers

> I think where my creativity is really expressed is how I solve problems. How I figure out how to help the group become more cohesive… and help each other, instead of destroy each other, which happens a lot in this business. So that's where my creativity comes in: figuring out people.[77]
>
> - Elizabeth Avellán

Whether it be people within the film community with whom Avellán has developed relationships, or individuals with whom she shares commitments to matters completely unrelated to the making of films, Avellán is connected to numerous communities to which she both

[76] *Secuestro Express*, directed by Jonathan Jakubowicz (2005; New York, NY: Miramax Films, 2006), DVD.

[77] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

contributes and can draw upon as resources in return. That is not to say, however, that her interest in developing relationships is utilitarian. Like Glickman, who emphasizes the importance of "genuinely" acknowledging people's contributions to her films, Avellán's interest in developing these relationships and providing support and resources to them is sincere.

Glickman explains the significance of sincerity in terms of creating a supportive filmmaking community with an example from her own experience. She says although financial resources may have been in short supply during the making of some of her independent films, one of her greatest resources has been the people she has had at her disposal. As Glickman notes, with regard to filmmaking, "there are a variety of economies that you're dealing in, and there are a variety of currencies. Cash or credit card is only one form of currency."[78] The loyalty and good will Avellán inspires in others, not only among the filmmaking community, but also among a variety of communities with which she is involved, is one of the "currencies" in which she deals. Like Glickman, who recognizes when "people have been so pivotal and instrumental in how they've moved all the bricks to build these different things!," Avellán similarly rewards the loyalty of others and is likewise rewarded for her own.

Glickman comments on the importance of creating genuine community when she gives an example from her own career: Toni Robertson, who was an Agfa film representative and also what Glickman describes as a "cinemama" to many people in the industry, donated 130,000 feet of raw stock for her first feature, *Fun* (1994), the financial value of which she says was "unfathomable." In return, Glickman promoted Agfa film among studios and filmmakers, which resulted in increased clients for Agfa, the company that helped start her career. Panavision similarly provided Glickman camera packages at costs below their rate card prices for anywhere

[78] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, October 7, 2011.

between seven and ten productions. In return, Glickman says:

> I made it my responsibility to find and bring back to their village things that they needed…I would always acknowledge them. But genuinely! Because without them, hello?! Without the camera package, how is it that you can make a million dollar movie and budget $5000 flat for a camera package inclusive of all the prime lenses needed for the film?[79]

Glickman says a Panavision executive indicated it was because of this commitment to their community that she was invited to appear in a Panavision catalog along side Teresa Medina, a cinematographer with whom she worked closely. Because she was one of the only producers featured in the catalog, this is one of the accomplishments of which she is most proud.

This emphasis Glickman places on "genuinely" becoming part of other filmmakers' communities, is part of the humanity that she and Avellán share. Avellán notes both she and Glickman pride themselves on "looking at the human side of every person that is working with us."[80] They do not simply see business partners in front of them, or potential resources and/or labor, for example. The relationships they build are genuine and sincere. Avellán acknowledges that the word "sincerity" is often used to describe her, which she attributes to her attempt to live by the following motto: "Consistency is the only proof of sincerity."[81]

Extending the Family to Film

As noted by Faz in the previous chapter, filmmaking is not unlike building a family, where ideally, all members of the group help one another to contribute to the greater good of the whole. Avellán makes a similar analogy, noting that because they had learned what negative

[79] Ibid.

[80] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[81] Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

environments movie sets can be when in Los Angeles, when she and Rodriguez moved back to Texas to both raise their own family and set up what would become Troublemaker Studios, they deliberately did so with the intent of creating a "film family"[82] as well. In essence, Avellán has taken Faz's model of combining personal and professional lives a step further and converted the family into an actual business model.

Besides their love of movies and their strong work ethic, it was their family-oriented natures that initially drew Avellán and Rodriguez together. Rodriguez has been quoted as having stated:

> If I had to be away from my family all the time to make movies, I wouldn't do it…I want to be a family man at home first, and that's what I get to do. I spend a ton of time with my kids, drawing things and designing ideas with them. It's like we're working on a family project, except these just happen to be movies.[83]

The type of environment in which Rodriguez works and thrives is one in which his creative and familial lives are virtually one. This type of environment depends upon a partnership with someone invested in the same goals, both in term of their career and their family life. Committed to the goal of creating a film family for herself and her husband in Austin, Texas, which would provide them the resources and flexibility to raise their children as they saw fit, Avellán and Rodriguez created an environment where Rodriguez has been able to maximize his time and energy in the service of both his films and his family. For the majority of his career, he has had what Rene Rodriguez calls, "the ultimate-work-from-home arrangement." In 2003, Rodriguez (the journalist) quoted the filmmaker as having claimed, "I do everything from here! I never leave the house!... I literally haven't left the house in months. I just went to pick up the kids from

[82] "Elizabeth Avellan," interview by John Pierson on February 10, 2010, RTF Master Class, Radio Television Film, College of Communication, The University of Texas, accessed June 15, 2011, http://rtf.utexas.edu/masterclass/audio/elizabeth-avellan.

[83] Rene Rodriguez, "Spy Kids 3," *Hispanic* vo. 16, iss. 7/8, July/August 2003, 94.

school today and I realized my battery was dead, because I hadn't used my car in so long."[84] Rodriguez has detailed a routine where he sleeps while the children are at school, which has enabled them to spend time together in the afternoons/evenings, and allowed Rodriguez to work well into the night. Early in Rodriguez's career, David Medina discussed the work of making films with Rodriguez, who described it in the following way: "I don't feel like I'm going to work. I feel like I am hanging out with my wife."[85]

As Helen Barlow has noted, wives who collaborate with their partners are of great importance to "family men" such as Rodriguez and Antonio Banderas, for example. Barlow explains that Banderas's wife, Melanie Griffith, starred in his directorial debut, *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), and together they manage their hectic schedules and those of their children. For these family men who Barlow describes as workaholics, "It helps that their wives are constant collaborators."[86]

Rodriguez's manager of many years, Robert Newman, has commented on the exceptional balance he and Avellán have achieved in terms of maintaining their creative and family priorities. He says, "It's a model I use with other clients I work with and try to emulate."[87] Avellán makes sure the studios are child-friendly and there are regularly kids on the movie sets.[88] Actor Eva Mendes has commented on the joy she experiences as one of Avellán and Rodriguez's "extended" family. She remembers arriving at the Austin airport to discuss a possible role in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, expecting a chauffeur and limousine to greet her. Instead, she

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[84] Ibid.

[85] David Medina, "No Dream is Too Hot," *Hispanic*, September 1999, 90.

[86] Helen Barlow, "Family Values," *The Sun Herald* (Sydney, Australia), September 16, 2001, Metro section, 9.

[87] Hornaday, "For Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán, Every Movie is a Family Film."

[88] Macor, *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids*, 282.

found Avellán and her children waiting. They loaded into the van and Mendes says they smothered her with kisses. She explains, "*Este lado humano es lo que me impulsó a decir que sí sin reparos*/[This human side is what made me decide yes without reservations.]"[89]

Avellán works hard to create a sense of family at Troublemaker Studies, and her nurturing character is largely what makes this possible. One of the most important things that she brings to the table, she believes, is maternal energy. Although she says not all directors need it, she indicates that many do "need maternal energy of both kinds, the discipline with the love…"[90] She offers both and explains that even when people make mistakes, "I always look at all the things they got right. You know? Very few mistakes are fatal."[91]

Connecting One on One

Avellán takes the time to get to know her cast and crew and to determine exactly how she can best nurture their talents. She says one of the things she and Glickman have in common is that they pride themselves in "looking at the human side of every person that is working with us…there is a whole life going on besides these twelve hours, fourteen hours we're together."[92] In many cases, people struggle with personal problems, which of course can affect job performance. Avellán's interest in the well-being of the people who work for her is not motivated by selfish needs. For example, she remembers that during the production of *From Dusk Till Dawn*, set decorator Felipe Fernández del Paso experienced a death in the family.

[89] Jose Daniel Bort, "Robert Rodríguez, ¿multitalentoso o maestro de control?" *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami), September 12, 2003, 3C.

[90] Avellán, personal interview with Mirasol Riojas.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

Avellán immediately released him from his duties and when he returned after four or five days, she suggested the crew bury a time capsule filled with mementos that represented important events that took place during the making of the movie in a dry lake bed nearby in an effort to help him heal. Fernández, she remembers, included something that belonged to his recently deceased mother, while Avellán included a baby shoe (she was pregnant at the time). She says, "It's things like that, that I know people never forget when they've been in one of my movies. It's that sort of humanity."

She also recalls when the mother of one of her production assistants became very ill, it reminded her of the trauma she herself had experienced when her own mother died during post-production of *From Dusk Till Dawn*. She felt compassion for the young woman who she knew could not afford to return home to visit her sick mother. Avellán assured her that she would still have a place at Troublemaker Studios when she returned, even if it meant that she had to give up her current position on the film on which they were working and paid for her ticket home.[93]

Glickman confirms the significance of even the seemingly inconsequential moments, noting that Avellán has an impact on people, for example, "just by asking somebody in the morning, you know, a driver of the honeywagon truck, 'Hey, how are you doing? Hey, how's it going with your kid?' 'cuz she heard she went to the doctor the day before…"[94] Whether it's a director or a production assistant, making a phone call to help someone get a doctor's appointment or giving them a small loan, Avellán cares for the people with whom she works.

The trust and good will that Avellán inspires in people is a benefit in terms of the positive work environment she has created for herself and Rodriguez, her cast and crew. Her generosity is

[93] Ibid.

[94] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, October 7, 2011.

notable not only with regard to her employees but with regard to numerous organizations, institutions, and populations to which she has ties.

Connecting with Communities

A strong supporter of numerous organizations that celebrate Texas history and culture, Avellán is a board member of CAST (Capital Area Statues, Inc.), which celebrates Texas through sculpture. She is on the advisory board of the Texas Book Festival, Austin Film Society, and University of Texas College of Communication,[95] The University of Texas Film Institute,[96] and The Autism Trust.[97] She is also actively involved in local film festivals such as the Austin Film Festival, South by Southwest and Fantastic Fest.[98]

Avellán's appreciation and support of the arts includes photography, which made one of Glickman's films, a documentary on photographer Herman Leonard something with which she wanted to become involved. Leonard's photographs of Marilyn Monroe and Billie Holiday had made lasting impressions on her as a child, and she felt the photographer's life was too valuable not to document. She admired his talent and explains that *Truth in Terms of Beauty* (2007) shows how "your talents will continue, even if you're self-destructive. They will always be there and God always will honor them.… As long as you are honoring your talents and taking care of your temple."[99] Two of Leonard's photographs, one of Holiday and one of two women in Afghanistan,

[95] "Elizabeth Avellán – College of Communication – The University of Texas at Austin," accessed December 13, 2011, http://communication.utexas.edu/alumni/council/elizabeth-avell%C3%A1n.

[96] Ballard, *Epiphany: True Stories of Sudden Insight*, 102.

[97] "The Autism Trust – Elizabeth Avellán," The Autism Trust USA, accessed December 13, 2011, http://www.theautismtrustusa.org/about-us/66-elizabeth.html.

[98] Carolyn Harrold, "The 10 of 2010," *Tribeza* (Austin, Texas), December 2010, 65.

[99] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

hang on the wall of Avellán's office at Troublemaker Studios.

A discussion of the photograph of the two Afghan women, Avellán explains, was one of the first personal connections she and actor Jeff Fahey made around their shared interest in human rights issues in Afghanistan. Avellán's generosity extends far beyond her commitments to local and regional organizations and institutions, as she has become involved in humanitarian efforts in the Middle East, largely through her connection to Fahey with whom she developed a close bond after bringing him on board the film *Planet Terror* at Rodriguez's request.

Avellán explains that when Fahey first entered her office and commented on Leonard's photograph of the two Afghan women, they discovered their common interest. Fahey had been doing work in Afghanistan at the time Avellán found him for the film, and she expressed her interest in finding a way to put her resources and energies to work towards the cause. At the time, Avellán was going through a very difficult period as her marriage to Rodriguez was ending. Avellán believes God brought Fahey into her life for a reason. He became a dear friend and was a much needed support during this difficult time. He introduced her to a world where she could find satisfaction and happiness through humanitarian work. She says she wanted to "fill [her] heart with something else," other than the personal problems she was experiencing.

About half way through the making of *Planet Terror*, Fahey introduced Avellán to Eric Henderson and Ellis Robinson, who were looking for investors for a sewing factory they wanted to establish in Afghanistan. Avellán says through Fahey, she had learned a good deal about the difficult situations so many Afghan widows have been facing over the past decade as a result of losing their husbands to the Afghan war. Upon losing their husbands, many women and their children become the responsibility of their husbands' families, which is a particular burden for families who already have very little materially speaking. Avellán's sensitivity to the issue

prompted her to provide the seed money to Henderson and Robinson, with the condition that their emphasis would be on training and employing Afghan widows. Safi Apparel now employs approximately 1400 people, half of whom Avellán approximates are women. Avellán is comforted by the fact that she has been part of an effort to create an industry where there was none, and she is also involved with the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), in an effort to assist Moroccan refugees return home from Algeria.[100]

The Rewards of Consistency and Sincerity

Avellán's involvement with organizations that serve numerous populations are not selfish, but rather, as she describes her involvement with Safi Apparel, out of a "desire of [her] heart," and the alliances she has built with these communities have, unintentionally, translated into a benefit for the filmmakers, studios, and investors with whom she works. Supporting her cast and crew also creates camaraderie that makes for good business in the long run, as this type of positive work environment creates a close-knit community of filmmakers who work together on project after project.

For example, Avellán remembers drawing on the connections she has made through her humanitarian work during the making of *Predators* in order to resolve a problem she was having obtaining a visa for Brazilian actor, Alice Braga, who had been cast as one of the main characters in the film. Avellán remember Braga was the only actor Rodriguez would consider for the role and so when the studio told Avellán they would have to choose another actor because the situation with her visa had become "too risky," she immediately considered how the network of contacts she had developed through her work with Fahey could be utilized. She felt confident her

[100] Ibid.

connections would be able to assist her with this time sensitive matter, and asked the studio to grant her five more days to obtain Braga's visa. She explained, "I know people in Washington. They can do this for me." Avellán's instincts were right, and her contacts came to her aid. Braga's visa was granted within three days, allowing production to move forward as planned.[101]

Avellán's cast and crews are devoted to her productions, and as Glickman describes it, Avellán is "the one that the cast trusts, that the cast can talk to."[102] The loyalty that she and Rodriguez command as a team is noteworthy and that loyalty can certainly facilitate the film production process goes smoothly. Avellán further explains that many of the people involved with the making of *Blacktino* (2010), her son Aron Burns's first feature were individuals who felt they owed her favors. It has also been documented that Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek signed on to *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* without having read a finished script, because of loyalty to Rodriguez,[103] which is another example that illustrates the point. Establishing a trusted network of filmmakers whom she can call on to participate in the making of a film at a moment's notice, and/or for less money than they might otherwise demand has its benefits, including minimizing expenses and maximizing creative control over Rodriguez's and other Troublemaker projects.

As Rodriguez explains, "I love exchanging budget for freedom. I can make [the studio] a big movie they can go out and sell, for nothing, and reap more benefits if it's successful. And if

[101] Ibid.

[102] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, October 7, 2011.

[103] Donna Freydkin, "Once Upon a Time, There were Three Unknowns," *USA Today*, September 9, 2003, 5D. Hayek's loyalty to Troublemaker, it should also be noted, can also be attributed to the very close friendship she and Avellán developed, soon after they met.

it's not successful, they didn't lose any money."[104] While financial considerations are of the utmost importance at Troublemaker, Avellán is able to balance her interest in the bottom line with genuine interest in her crew. The following example of her generosity on the set of *Predators* is a testament to the fact she recognizes and values them not only as sources of labor and potential profit, but also as people with whom she connects and creates true community.

Towards the end of the making of *Predators*, Avellán remembers that Rodriguez was steadfast in his demand that the film come in under budget, which depended upon production being finished by midnight on the last scheduled day of production. Avellán says on the last day, the cast and crew made this somewhat difficult. They had become so close, she says, that every time an actor wrapped, she would be called out of her office to join the group as people hugged, cried, and said their goodbyes. She recalls it took between fifteen minutes and half an hour for people to get back to work each time, making it clear the shoot was going to go beyond midnight. Avellán explained to Rodriguez, "Robert, this is what's going on over here…. I think we're going to be done at two… and you know, I can pay for it." She says the celebration went on well into the morning and that it was a truly wonderful experience. Avellán's humanity and her recognition of the value of currencies other than cash, prove to be two of her biggest assets that interestingly enough often produce added financial gain for Troublemaker, their investors and their business partners.

Creative Money Matters

As Ramírez-Berg has noted with regard to the creative process, which is difficult to control, "You have to, you know, nurture it, and allow time for it, and so you can't always

[104] Kevin Lally, "High School Hell: Teens Battle Evil in Rodriguez's *The Faculty*," *Film Journal International* (December 1998): 30.

schedule it, plan it, and budget it the way you would like to, as much as you try."[105] This is where Avellán's creativity in how she handles money and in how she manages the entire filmmaking process facilitates the "creative process" of other creative figures, such as the directors with whom she works. The processes go hand in hand. Without the director, there would be no creative vision for a producer to manage. Likewise, the producer is key to maximizing the resources to which the director has access, as well as coordinating them in ways that best serve his/her vision. What is available to the director is a result of a combination of forces that come together as a result of communication among numerous individuals. Those individuals are, throughout the filmmaking process, negotiating: 1) the desired result is, 2) resources available to meet the needs of the artists working towards that goal, 3) the limitations are with regard to the production, and 4) the best way to meet the needs of the production. A change to one aspect of the negotiation can stimulate an adjustment on any other aspect of the process and so the producer's role in coordinating and prioritizing resources is key to the overall production process. Their vision of the "whole" process, where money is being spent, and how it can best be utilized to achieve the desired effect, is key to bringing what is commonly understood as the "creative" vision to life on the screen.

Being Practical, or How to Find $2 Million Buried Dollars in Your Budget

Avellán explains that her maternal instinct can take many forms, and that often times with directors, as is the case with children, "it's like, look, you can complain, but I may not be able to do anything about it. Ok? But you can air out what you're feeling." One example of this kind of motherly love, she explains, she showed to director Nimrod Antal during the making of

[105] "9th Annual, ¡A Viva Voz! – Machetes, Mariachis, and Spy Kids: Elizabeth Avellán Makes Movies (2/6)."

Predators. Antal, she says, often came to her office to vent about his problems, which she allowed him to do. She indicates that as a result, they became quite close. She says, "I think he always felt that I had his back. He felt safe with me."[106]

In this particular case, Avellán says Rodriguez, who was also a producer on the film, provided Antal with advice about how to make the film while Avellán provided more of the emotional support. When Antal needed extra time to finish the shoot after becoming distracted by another of his films, which had done poorly at the box office after its release, Avellán provided much more than emotional support. She found creative ways to come up with money, and thus time, which Antal needed to create the film he envisioned.

Avellán says production of *Predators* was costing Troublemaker Studios approximately $180,000 per day. She calculated how much the extra time would cost, and then went looking for the money. Her line producer had been searching the budget, line by line, and simply could not figure out a way to fund the extra time. Avellán, however, being as familiar with the set and the crew as she was, knew that visual effects were not being used quite as much as had been anticipated, and thus budgeted. She says:

> I kept hearing about, "Oh yeah, we did that practical."[107] So I grabbed this young man that was working for us and I knew he had been the visual effects person on set that had worked for us. And I said to him, I said, "Tonight, on set, this is what I need you to do. And I know that you got work to do…." I said, "…but I need you to go through all these shots and tell me what's no longer going to be in the movie for sure, because it's been scrapped. What is being done practical that is not going to cost as much as we had bid for… I need you to report to me by three or four in the morning if you can."

[106] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[107] Being done "practical" refers to using physical techniques such as wires/wire removal rather than visual effects such as a 3D shot, for example.

Avellán discovered approximately $2 million in the visual effects line that were not going to be used and so some of those monies could be spent on the extra days Antal needed.

Knowing the financial status of the production can be key in moments like this, which is something Avellán learned from working with Paul Hellerman. She says, "That man knew where we stood and where there was five cents you could put towards somewhere where we needed. Ok? That's an incredible gift that man has. Wow!" It is also a capability that Avellán has, although she says she does not always work this way. She is strategic about when and where she spends her energy, and with regard to the financial aspect of her job she says, "so much of what I do as a producer, money-wise even, is creative."[108]

Turning Good Cents into Dollars – Aron Burns and *Blacktino*

Avellán's facility with finances is something she has passed on to her son, the young filmmaker Aaron Burns. Burns has publicly credited Rodriguez as an influence and it is on a very rare occasion that it is noted that Avellán is his mother.[109] It is striking that the discussion of Burns' filmmaking endeavors is more closely attached to Rodriguez, who became a mentor in his adult years, as opposed to his own mother, who has been supporting his filmmaking career since he was a boy. As is so common with women filmmakers, as was illustrated by Faz and her relationship with Gutiérrez, Avellán is eager for her partner to be recognized for his efforts, while downplaying her own. When asked about where her son has learned the discipline that has

[108] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[109] See, for example, "Interview with Writer/Director Aaron Burns," interview by Neil Lumbard, DVD Talk, accessed October 4, 2011, http://www.dvdtalk.com/interviews/interview_with_1.html. Burns, himself, mentions his mother is Venezuelan, but makes no mention of her by name, nor of the fact that she and her Production Company, EYA Productions, made the film possible. Rodriguez, while not identified as his step-father, is, however, credited for inspiring Burns with his book, *Rebel Without a Crew*, when Burns read it at twelve years of age, and he also gives him credit for teaching him much about filmmaking during the four years he was employed at Troublemaker Studios, as a young adult.

facilitated his filmmaking efforts, she answered that he has always admired Rodriguez's "single-mindedness," and that Rodriguez has been "very generous" as a mentor, particularly in Burns' adult life. She explains that during his teen years, when the couple was in Los Angeles and Burns stayed in Texas, it was difficult to be close. Rodriguez was much less involved in his life and it was later, after Burns turned 18, that he allowed Burns to work in the visual effects department at Troublemaker Studios, where Burns found mentors.

Avellán, however, had been encouraging Burns to follow his interest in filmmaking which he evidenced as early as his pre-teens. She remembers, " I bought him every gadget, camera, thing, book, that he ever wanted because I knew he would use it,"[110] which he did when making films with a group of theater friends from school. In fact, Avellán encouraged Burns in all of his creative endeavors. As previously mentioned, Avellán had been involved in theater during college, and she valued those experiences. She passed this appreciation on to her son, who became involved in theater during high school. Avellán says that at the point Burns no longer needed credit for the courses, but was contemplating whether or not to continue, she encouraged him to do so. One of the most striking things about the theater, she notes, is:

> You're in this space where there's no judgment for each other. You know, people actually kind of accept each other. You may not accept the gay kid out there but you will accept this one cuz you guys have to have each other's backs when you're doing these plays and all of that stuff. And there is something very valuable this one's gonna bring to the table.[111]

In the theater, Burns had an opportunity to develop his creativity as a writer, and also to learn some important lessons about both diversity and working with a team. The experience had a

[110] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[111] Ibid.

profound enough effect on the young man that it became the subject of his first feature film, *Blacktino*, which was produced under Avellán's EYA banner. The film is about a teenage boy, Stefan, who is half black and half Latino, as is Burns himself. Stefan is involved with the theater group at his high school, and has a wide variety of friends who might otherwise be considered misfits. Stefan's father is a big-time Hollywood producer, as is Burns's real-life mother, Avellán. As Burns describes it, the film is "10 percent reality and 90% universal fiction."[112]

One of the most interesting things about the film, however, is the way that Burns and Avellán funded the project. To return to Avellán's support of her son's filmmaking endeavors, *Blacktino*'s funding history begins in Burns' youth, about twelve years ago. Avellán explains that her son has always exhibited an unusual amount of intelligence. "He's very smart about money."[113] Out of concern that her son should learn to live within his means (as she and Rodriguez had done, even in the most difficult of times), she began to teach him how to handle money at fourteen years of age. She gave Burns books to read and they discussed the stock market, along with how to analyze a financial portfolio. Avellán gave Burns $3000 to invest in any way he wished. After doing his research, Avellán remembers, "He looked at me and he goes, 'Ok, Mom. I'm ready to invest… I wanna put it all on Pixar.' I'm like, 'Are you crazy? I told you that's not how you do it!' I said, 'What if it falls…?'" Burns, however, reasoned with his mother, asking whether or not it was truly his money to invest, and whether or not he would learn a valuable lesson, regardless of the results of his investment. Avellán agreed that no matter the outcome, he would learn a valuable lesson, and so she made the investment her son had chosen. She explains:

[112] "Interview with Writer/Director Aaron Burns."

[113] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

> Well he turned $3,000 twelve years ago into $39,000, and then when DisneyPixar joined, he sold it all and bought, with that money, Apple stock at 120… and we haven't sold our Apple stock yet. But that's where the money… not all the money, but a lot of the money [for *Blacktino*] is coming [from].[114]

Representing Latinas/os on the Big Screen

Blacktino is a story told from the perspective of the underdog, the social misfit who belongs neither here nor there. A film with a social conscience, which is at once smart and entertaining, it conforms to a pattern exhibited by most of Avellán's work: a commitment she has to making films that are both fun and meaningful. Avellán's most "successful" films, in terms of the revenue they have generated, have generally been the action movies, children's action movies, and occasional political satire she has made with Rodriguez (those made under the Troublemaker banner, as well as those that preceded the studio's establishment). While many of the films do contain social commentary regarding racial and social inequities (though certainly not all of them do), that commentary does not dominate the texts, which are most notable for their entertainment value. Avellán began her career devoted solely to the production of Rodriguez's films, but over the years she has increasingly pursued her own creative interests, independent of him. Her films consistently reflect her interests in humanitarian efforts and issues of concern to Latina/o populations, particularly those she is producing through her own production company, EYA Productions.

Beginning with the body of work she has produced with Rodriguez, Avellán co-produced Rodriguez's first independent feature, *El Mariachi*, which was an action film based on a case of mistaken identity. The film was conceptualized as the first of a trilogy of films about a mariachi, and it was intended for the Spanish video market in preparation for a "demo tape [to] get

[114] Ibid. Avellán notes that although they have yet to actually sell the Apple stock (they are continuing to let it grow), this is the money with which the film was financed.

financing for a *real* movie." Rodriguez is not an explicitly political writer/director, but his experience and perspective as a Mexican-American filmmaker are inseparable from his work. *El Mariachi* is about a musician who fights for both his life and that of his girlfriend, when an Anglo-American drug lord's henchmen mistake him for a former business partner they have been sent to kill. The film contains controversial subtext, what film reviewer Lawrence Russell says "may or may not be intentional – a class war that still runs through Mexican society, a legacy of the Conquest, which pits the *mestizo* against his half-brother and sometime partner, *Senor Blanco*."[115] The film addresses the constant state of crisis that both Mexican and Mexican-American cultures experience as they are subjected to an Anglo-American presence that continues to alter both cultures, amplifying the *mestizaje* of people of Mexican heritage.

Studio executives proposed a remake of *El Mariachi* in 1992, but Rodriguez recognized the persistence of stereotypes and the film industry's insistence on dichotomizing between good and bad with portrayals of whites and Latinos, respectively. He made a conscious decision to reverse those roles when he made the "bad guy" an American drug dealer in his first film. Having a completed picture on hand, Rodriguez was in a position to insist his characters remain the ethnicities he initially intended in the script and as they had been shot for the film. Rodriguez explains that he "didn't want the [bad guy] to be Mexican; there's enough bad guy Mexicans in movies. [He] wanted the bad guy to be an American drug lord who had fled the states, set up shop in a small Mexican town, and took it over."[116] A story of one man's struggle to stay alive, *El Mariachi* is also a story of cultural integrity that threatens to be compromised as a result of American expansionism. Rodriguez's awareness of and resistance to Latino invisibility is evident

[115] Russell, Lawrence, "El Mariachi," *Film Court*, accessed November 11, 2002, www.coastnet.com/~lwr/Fcourt/ElMariachi.htm.

[116] Rodriguez, *Rebel Without a Crew*, 21.

in his work, but the potential profit from distributing the film as it was proved to be too great a temptation for studios to pass up, despite any issues of race/ethnicity with which they might have been uncomfortable.

As a filmmaker interested in working in Hollywood, Rodriguez had to consider the pros and cons of working within a system that has historically been resistant to Latino filmmakers and themes that complicate matters of race beyond stereotypes. He finally accepted an offer from Columbia Pictures, and as he negotiated the terms of his contract before releasing *El Mariachi*, he admitted:

> I think there's a point in Hollywood when you realize you've become a whore. This was the point for me. I want to work so badly and I think Columbia seems open to most of my ideas to the point that I could earn great pay while at the same time having fun making a few crazy movies.[117]

While open to his ideas, the Hollywood production of *Desperado*, the sequel to *El Mariachi*, is exemplary of the transformation Hollywood values impose on independent filmmakers and those ideas. Rodriguez does position himself in opposition to a larger system in his categorization of "us" and "them" as he explains, "The only way Latinos can get into Hollywood is by making our own movies so we can show them that we have talent."[118] Making movies, of course, requires resources, and so it is not surprising that filmmakers balance their interests in creating new images with their interests in obtaining the resources necessary to create them.

Desperado, effectively the remake of *El Mariachi* that executives spoke of only a couple of years before, illustrates the kind of negotiation that takes place when introducing complicated ideas about race into mainstream, commercial cinema. With the commercial release of *El*

[117] Ibid., 109.

[118] Ibid., 75.

Mariachi, Rodriguez had instantly become a household name. Columbia picked the film up, marketed it as an action-adventure film, and focused on the spectacle of the low cost of production to make a substantial profit. The economic motivations that allowed the subtext of the film (which would have been significantly changed had Moco not been white) to make it to the big screen are undeniable.

In contrast, the absence of an American "bad guy" in *Desperado* is significant. The film is the story of a mariachi bent on avenging the murder of his lover, Domino, who was killed in *El Mariachi*. The mariachi had actually killed the man responsible for Domino's death in the first film. Her death, therefore, had already been avenged. This storyline in *Desperado*, however, provides an opportunity for both a simple lead into the sequel and it also displaces sentiments against Anglo-Americans implied by the subtext of *El Mariachi*. Clearly, Rodriguez had envisioned the sequel to *El Mariachi* differently than it was executed in *Desperado*. In the sequel, all issues of American imposition are effectively removed. For example, Moco, the "bad guy" in *El Mariachi* is a drug lord/authority figure who exercises complete control as he dominates people in a foreign land that he now occupies. *Desperado* clearly indicates Moco was not the drug lord, but only a middleman answering to a higher authority. In *Desperado*, it is made clear that Moco was working for Bucho, a Mexican drug lord who is not Anglo-American, at all. In essence, the challenge that *El Mariachi* posed to the status quo is absent in *Desperado*. American morals are recuperated as it is a Mexican drug ring under Mexican authority that is responsible for the pain and suffering inflicted upon the Mexican hero, the mariachi. The political content of *El Mariachi* was effectively domesticated in *Desperado*.

Sneaking Spies and Latinos in the Back Door

The release of *Desperado*, however, was a milestone in that both the protagonist and leading lady, Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek, who at the time were virtual unknowns in the U.S. film industry, were Latino. A well-established actor in his home country of Spain, Banderas had begun securing supporting roles in the U.S. with films such as *Philadelphia* (1993), but he did not speak English when he first came to the U.S. Avellán, in fact, served as Banderas's dialect coach during the making of *Desperado*.[119] Similarly, Hayek, who had a successful acting career as a soap opera star in Mexico found that when she tried to break into the Hollywood industry, her heavy accent posed a problem. Avellán and Rodriguez were a "catalyst" in terms of bringing both of these actors, as well as many other Latinos, into the mainstream.[120] Troublemaker's films such as *The Faculty* (2000), *The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl* (2005), *Sin City* (2005), and *Grind House* (2007), although not specifically Latino-themed, include a high number of other Latina/o stars such as George Lopez, Jessica Alba, Rosario Dawson, Cheech Marin, Danny Trejo, and Freddy Rodriguez. While the couple does not emphasize their films as "Latino," many of their other films are Latino-themed and set in Mexico and/or some unnamed Latin American countries, which allows various aspects of Latina/o culture to make its way to audiences that might otherwise not be exposed to the culture(s).

The *Spy Kids* series, for example, is the story of the Cortez family, a family of international spies who are from an unspecified Latin American country. The films incorporate aspects of Latina/o culture into the stories and appeals to an emerging Hispanic audience while also utilizing the idea of pan-Latino ethnicity, which commodifies and mainstreams exotic "Latin" cultures. As Rodriguez told *Film Journal International* in 1998, "I try to disguise my

[119] "Elizabeth Avellan," interview by John Pierson.

[120] Ibid.

Latin films in the realm of something much more popular, so that it has a chance to cross over and be a success and people don't even think about it."[121] Rodriguez says the original *Spy Kids* (2001)[122] story "takes place in South America; there's a lot of Latin influence in the movie. But you can't call it a Latino film."[123] The non-descript "Latin" flavor is evident throughout the film, from the style of architecture to the shooting locations and casting choices made for the film.

The effort to affirm the power of identity throughout the film takes several forms. For example, the father's name, Gregorio Cortez recalls the injustice surrounding the wrongful criminal accusation and subsequent flight, pursuit, arrest, and persecution of the Mexican folkhero of the same name during the early 1900s. The reference to this historical figure validates the history of resistance of Latinas/os (specifically Mexicans) to social and racial injustice (though it is important to note Gregorio is an international spy who works for the state, even if his name does refer to the injustice inflicted upon Latinas/os, by the state). The name of Gregorio's daughter, Carmen, carries similar weight in a scene in which she arrives at the safe house and is required to supply a passcode to gain access. When asked for her full name, Carmen responds, "I don't use my full name, it's too long." She finally answers, "Carmen Elizabeth Juanita Ecosca Brava Cortez," and is granted entry. Carmen is astonished and asks, "my name's the passcode?" indicating she does not yet understand the power and strength her name (and history) carries.

As Avellán sees it, it is precisely because they have not emphasized that their films are "Latino" that she and Rodriguez have been able to retain the kind of control and flexibility to do

[121] Lally, "High School Hell," 30.

[122] *Spy Kids*, directed by Robert Rodriguez (New York, NY: Miramax Films, 2001).

[123] Louis B. Clark, "Rodriguez Spies the Kid Inside," *The Houston Chronicle* 2 Star Edition, March 29, 2001, 19.

things like increasing Latino visibility. She notes, "It's all about high concept in a way…. Yes I'm a woman. Yes I'm Latina…" She says that she and Rodriguez, however, have never indicated to their partners that they should be involved with them because of their ethnicity, as though they were owed anything because of it. She says it wasn't as if, "you know, we're Latinos and you're gonna do this for us. We may be Latinos, but we're gonna give you a product that's gonna make you money. That was our be all and end all, always. Money for our partners."[124] That approach, she feels, is an unusual one for Latino filmmakers to take.

Mentoring

Avellán also exhibits sensitivity and commitment to telling culturally specific stories that depict the diversity of the Latina/o experience, particularly through the films she has produced independent of Rodriguez outside of the Hollywood system. Avellán says, "The reality is, I'm from another country, and I'm more interested in international news than the average American. That's reality, sadly enough."[125] Many of the filmmakers whom she has supported are from Latin American countries. Avellán attends to her interest in advancing the status of not only Latinas/os, but women, and a number of other disadvantaged groups, particularly through her production company, EYA Productions, which is a play on words. Ella – pronounced EYA – is the Spanish word for "she."

Students

[124] Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[125] King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán."

As previously mentioned, Avellán serves on the Advisory Board for the University of Texas College of Communication and she supports the work of the film students at the University. She regularly speaks to film classes in the RTF department and is currently working with Chair of the department, Paul Stekler, to create a scholarship fund for Latin American film students. In 2011, the university reported that approximately 25% of the film students (both graduate and undergraduate) are Hispanic, and although most are Texas natives, "many come from California and Florida, and Spanish-speaking countries, including Mexico, Peru and Venezuela."[126] Avellán notes the continuing increase in students from Latin American countries (who she estimates may represent as high as half of all Latino students) includes unique and talented voices, but she adds that there are surely many more who are unable to enroll in the program due to financial hardship. The scholarship fund, she hopes, will attract even more talented filmmakers from Latin America, and thereby create a niche for the RTF department at UT, similar to the way UCLA, NYU, and other reputable film programs have established other niches for themselves.[127] Stekler notes in the same article from which the above statistic is taken that UT's RTF program is a "top-ranked film program with real economic diversity—and therefore racial diversity." Together, he and Avellán are working to further support these emerging voices.

Avellán is especially impressed by the films that the young women from the program are making, as she says they "seek stories" that are "different" from those the young men are making. For example, Avellán was the executive producer on former UT graduate student Maru

[126] "A New Lens on the American Experience: The university's film program equips the next wave of Latino filmmakers with the tools to share their world views." University of Texas at Austin, April 4, 2011, accessed April 10, 2012, http://www.utexas.edu/features/2011/04/04/latino_filmmakers/.

[127] Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

Buendia-Senties's short film *Entre líneas/Between the Lines* (2009), which details the relationship between a young man and woman who maintain a friendship across the U.S.-Mexico border. Avellán also employed Buendia-Senties at Troublemaker Studios between 2008 and 2011,[128] and admires her hard work as someone who took advantage of the opportunity to learn about all aspects of filmmaking at Troublemaker, while also making her own short films. Born in Mexico and having grown up on the Texas-Mexico border, Buendia-Senties is an example of a student who tells stories that are grounded in Latin American experiences and have the potential to contribute to changing the shape of the industry. As Black notes, Avellán "doesn't just talk the talk… she hires the hire. She supports the next generation."[129]

Nicolás López

Unrelated to the University, Avellán also supports numerous other filmmakers, Latin American and otherwise. To focus on a few other Latin American filmmakers, for the purposes of this study, however, Avellán served as a producer on *Santos* (2008), by Chilean writer/director Nicolás López. Avellán's contributed to the film by assisting with completion of the heavy visual effects component of the film at Troublemaker Studios during the film's postproduction.[130] As Lorenza Munoz notes, Avellán took the up-and-coming filmmaker under her wing, giving him advice as to how to navigate the Hollywood system. Avellán explained to a *Los Angeles Times* journalist that without the right support, filmmakers can be "chewed up and spit out by the

[128] "Maru Buendia-Senties - Award Winning Writer/Director – Resume," accessed April 4, 2011, http://test.marubuendia.com/?page_id=8.

[129] Black, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[130] Marc Savlov, "Around the World of Weird: The many genre delights of Fantastic Fest 2008," *The Austin Chronicle*, September 12, 2008.

Hollywood machine, and nobody will hear from you again."[131] Furthermore, she feels that many Latin American filmmakers, specifically, come to the U.S. with hopes of making Hollywood films, but because of the differences in culture and language they have difficulty navigating the industry. With the help of strong producers to help them learn the system, she says, many more of these filmmakers who have such different perspectives and stories to tell might be able to survive.[132] Although *Santos* was not a box office success, Avellán recognized talent in López and took a risk on him. One of the things that has drawn Avellán to López's films is the presence of universal themes. As the *Austin Chronicle*'s Marc Savlov saw it, *Santos* addressed love, friendship, and romantic rivalry. López further explains that the setting of the film, Capital City, "has a huge mix of cultures and languages, because, in the mentality of the movie, we say that Europe and Asia don't exist anymore, and everyone now lives in Latin America."[133]

The filmmaker went on to write and direct *Que Pena Tu Vida* (2010) and *Que Pena Tu Boda* (2011), both of which were highly successful in Chile. Next, López will be exposing international audiences to a specifically Chilean experience through his first English-language film, *Aftershock*, which he is currently directing. Inspired by the recent Chilean earthquake in 2010, *Aftershock* is a horror film about mental patients who escape from a Chilean insane asylum after a terrible quake. López co-wrote the screenplay with Eli Roth, who is also producing and will star in the picture[134] (which is expected to be released in late 2012). As Roth sees it, the project marks the beginning of "Chilewood," which he envisions as "making genre films for the

[131] Lorenza Munoz, "Young director has Hayek in his corner," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2007, C1.

[132] "Elizabeth Avellan," interview by John Pierson.

[133] Savlov, "Around the World of Weird."

[134] Roth is best known for writing/producing/directing *Hostel* (2005), as well as for the role he played in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009).

global market using all the resources Chile has to offer."[135] So while López's films may be universal on some levels, much like the *Spy Kids* series, they do and will expose audiences to a world that is distinctly Latin American.

Jonathan Jakubowiz, Sandra Condito, and Secutestro Express

Closer to home, Avellán has nurtured the talents of fellow Venezuelan filmmaker, Jonathan Jakubowicz, and she was responsible for initially encouraging him to come to the United States to pursue his film career. Jakubowicz came into contact with Avellán through her father, who had installed cable at his home during his youth. Jakubowicz, who was a film critic and also interested in making his own films at an early age interviewed Avellán when he was 17 or 18 years old, a couple of years after meeting Avellán's father. The interview took place on Jakubowicz's radio show at Radio Caracas, which is, incidentally, one of the stations Avellán grandfather started many years ago. Avellán remembers being extremely impressed by Jakubowicz's film critiques, as well as the quality of his interview, so she was receptive to his offer to send her samples of his work in the future. It was his documentary *Ship of Hopes* (2000), about Jewish refugees who fled Europe to Venezuela that prompted Avellán to invest in the young filmmaker's career.

By 2001, Jakubowicz was working as a production assistant on *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. Avellán remembers introducing the young filmmaker to Miramax co-founder Harvey Weinstein on an occasion that he happened to visit the set. She explained to Weinstein, "I need you to meet this young man…. You're going to be buying one of his movies very soon,

[135] "Eli Roth and Selena Gomez Team For Chilean Film 'Aftershock,'" February 6, 2012, The Film Stage, accessed April 10, 2012, http://thefilmstage.com/news/eli-roth-and-selena-gomez-team-for-chilean-earthquake-film-aftershock/.

someday."[136] Little did she know, it would be sooner than she imagined. Jakubowicz enrolled in a Master's program at UT Austin and also worked in production on the film, *Spy Kids 2* (2002), before making *Secuestro Express* which Miramax did distribute (detailed below).

At the time Jakubowicz joined Avellán's crew, Sandra Condito, whom Avellán had met when Condito was working at Dimension Films as a publicist on *The Faculty* (1998). Dimension had sent Condito to work with Troublemaker Studios in Austin on a full-time basis in response to the unusual request for Rodriguez to deal with only one person (that being Condito), rather than several. Condito explains working with Rodriguez and Avellán created more than a working relationship between them – it turned them into "*una verdadera familia*/[a real family]." It is because of this that they have such "*confianza y seguridad*/*[*trust and security]"[137] in the work they have done together. Avellán has mentored Condito and given her career advice over the years. At this moment in time, however, she knew Condito did not wish to remain a publicist, and she recognized her as someone with an incredible sense of humor and a gift for storytelling. About her experience on *Secuestro Express*, which she worked on with Jakubowicz (director and producer) and Avellán (executive produer), Condito says:

> *Gracias al apoyo que me dio Elizabeth pude cumplir con todas mis responsabilidades, que fueron desde ayudar en el desarrollo del argumento y colaborar en la selección de cada uno de los protagonistas, hasta participar en la planificación de la campaña de promoción y publicidad.*/[Thanks to Elizabeth's support, I was able to take care of my responsibilities, which ranged from assisting with the development and collaborating on the selection of each one of the protagonists, to participating in the planning of the promotion and publicity campaign.][138]

[136] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[137] Juan Rodriguez Flores, "Una aventura con sentido social," *La Opinión*, August 4, 2005, 2.

[138] Flores, "Una aventura."

Condito is an example of a "creative producer" who was highly involved with the creative decisions and development of the project, from beginning to end, and she is someone who Avellán has mentored and brought into the fold of the Hollywood film industry. Condito, who was born in Connecticut but raised in the Dominican Republic, shares Avellán's passion for making films that are at once socially responsible and entertaining,[139] and she therefore represents yet another potential source of change in the industry.

Avellán says Condito, she, and Jakubowicz had an opportunity to become close friends during the making of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. When she recognized that her two mentees had an interest in making a film and also shared a similar energy and intellect, it was the most natural thing for her to encourage them to work together and so she put her energy to the task. Avellán recalls *Secuestro Express*'s future filmmakers having conversations about social consciousness with Rubén Blades, who was an actor in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and also very knowledgeable about Latin America. The conversations included discussions of the Venezuelan situation and the "express kidnappings" which are also taking place in other Latin American countries.[140] Upper class individuals are abducted, usually for several hours at a time, and held captive until their ransoms are paid. Having both been raised socialist, Avellán says she and Jakubowicz believe the kidnappings and other violent crimes in Venezuela are not solely the result of the Hugo Chavez administration, but of generations of Venezuelans turning their backs on the underprivileged in their own country. Caracas is home of the second largest slum in the world, where the rich and poor are highly segregated and unfamiliar with the conditions in which each other live. Jakubowicz notes in the director's commentary on the DVD *Secuestro Express*

[139] Ibid.

[140] King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán."

he feels that in Venezuela, "our political problems are a consequence of our social problems." As Avellán explains, "all of a sudden we were seeing the repercussions of that as young people, and with our family members."[141] Jakubowicz, himself, has even been a victim of an express kidnapping in Venezuela.

When Jakubowicz returned to the U.S. after working on his first film with Troublemaker Studios, he found himself taking a film class for which he needed a short film subject. Condito suggested a documentary about the express kidnappings, which Jakubowicz initially thought were too common to make for an interesting film. Condito insisted that it was precisely because the practice is so common that it would be a terrific subject.[142] Upon considering the costs associated with the short documentary, the producers recognized it made more sense to make a feature film – what would become *Secuestro Express*.[143] Avellán offered to provide the crew and equipment and also pay the costs associated with post-production if Condito and Jakubowicz could find a way to pay for the production.[144]

Jakubowicz based his screenplay on his own experiences as a kidnap victim, as well as those of the kidnappers and victims he encountered while doing research on the topic. The goal was to expose the circumstances that give rise to the violence in Venezuelan society, rather than condemn either the rich or the poor for their behavior. Jakubowicz approached the successful Venezuelan rappers, *Vagos y Maleantes* (Pedro Madera and Carlos Madera) and *DJ Trece*

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[141] Ibid.

[142] Rebecca Murray, "Writer Director Jonathan Jakubowicz Discusses 'Secuestro Express,'" About.com, accessed June 16, 2011, http://movies.about.com/od/directorinterviews/a/jakbwicz072805.htm.

[143] Wilfredo Hernandez," *Secuestro Express*," *Chasqui: Revista de literature latinoamericana* vol. 35, no. 1 (May 2006): 186.

[144] King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán."

(Carlos Molina) to perform the music on what he thought was going to be a short documentary. The rappers believed strongly in the project, the *Vagos* having been raised in the violent *barrio* of Cotiza and knowing all too well the violence and inequities that pervade the country.[145] They immediately expressed interest in participating not only as musicians, but as actors in the film. Jakubowicz was so impressed with the 35 minute impromptu performance they did for the camera, he says it helped him to decide it was a feature he would be making. The script he wrote specifically for them.[146] The actors therefore can be seen as dictating to some extent the material in the film, not only in terms of the inspiration their personalities and acting provided Jakubowicz, but also in terms of their knowledge. As Avellán describes it, while they liked the script Jakubowicz wrote, the actors explained to him that the characters he had created were "*malandros de deficio, no malandros de barrio/* [poser thugs, not thugs from the *barrio]*,"[147] and so they helped the director to refine the script. For example, they gave him language/slang used in the Venezuelan prisons and *barrios*, and suggested the kidnapping victims include a boyfriend who could be harassed by the kidnappers, rather than be only a young woman alone, as the original script described. In this regard, Wilfredo Hernandez gives credit to not only the actors who lent authenticity to the film, but also to Jakubowicz for having the "*inteligencia*/[intelligence]" to select them as his "*colaboradores más cercanos*/[closest collaborators]."[148]

[145] Hernandez, "*Secuestro Express*," 186.

[146] King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán."

[147] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[148] Hernandez, "*Secuestro Express*," 186-187.

Synergy on Secuestro

With regard to his collaborators, Jakubowicz explains the significance of the acting style, editing, sound, camerawork, and digital video in creating the feeling that viewers are a part of the kidnapping. He says, "It was an entire process of getting to where we are in the technique. Each and every department was on the same page."[149] Much of the process of making *Secuestro Express* might be considered a true collaboration, particularly considering that postproduction was completed by a number of filmmakers who have regularly worked together on many of Rodriguez and Avellán's films. In addition, Jakubowicz had long been a fan of Rodriguez's and had learned much from him and the Troublemaker team during the making of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and *Spy Kids 2*, including camerawork and frenetic editing, so their influence quite visible in his film.

Much of *Secuestro Express*'s success can be attributed to the commitment of the many individuals who collaborated on the project. The film was made by individuals who were committed to a single vision, as Jakubowicz describes, above, and who understood it as a social statement – something that would be an important contribution to Venezuelan and Latin American filmmaking. Both Blades and the leading lady, Mia Maestro believed so much in the project that they agreed to act in the film without pay.[150] In this sense, the film can be considered a product of several communities, including the Troublemaker Studios community and the community of Latinas/os in the film industry that Avellán has helped to cultivate. Avellán's significance as a pivotal figure around whom the necessary components of the film gathered

[149] Murray, "Writer Director Jonathan Jakubowicz."

[150] Ibid.

cannot be ignored. She was instrumental in bringing the right people and resources together at the right time.

In terms of the specific instances in which her particular skills become invaluable Avellán says, "I have real intuition about when some things should happen and not." For example, when Jakubowicz was ready to begin filming *Secuestro Express*, Avellán advised against it due to the high probability that he would be kidnapped during the process when going into the ghettos to shoot the film. Instead, she advised: "You're gonna make a music video for those boys. Get them in your pocket. *Comiendo alpiste, como pajaritos*./[eating seed from the palm of your hand, like birds]." She further advised him to do the work free of charge and to circulate the video on MTV. The result, the music video for "Guajira," which is from the *Vagos y Maleantes*'s hit album *Papidandeando*, rotated with great success on MTV Latin America and MTV Latino USA (among other networks). Avellán says that to this day the risk of Jakubowicz being kidnapped in Venezuela is nonexistent.

Avellán also recognized an unparalleled opportunity in the oil strike that began in December of 2002 and was staged for months, in an attempt to force the resignation of President Hugo Chavez. She immediately advised Jakubowicz to begin filming on the relatively empty streets of Caracas, which are, under normal circumstances, some of the most congested in the world. Because of the scarcity of gasoline and the work stoppage, many of the cast and crew, who agreed to work on the film for relatively little pay, did so in exchange for free gas that was provided by Jakubowicz's father, who helped to finance the film. The gasoline and time saved at the gas stations (Avellán indicates people were waiting up to seven hours at a time during the strike) were tremendous incentives, and thereby contributed to keeping the costs of the film low (under $500,000).

Jakubowicz is a talented filmmaker who, like Avellán, acknowledges the importance of bringing the right things together at the right time, and he recognizes sage advice when he hears it. He also recognizes the role that chance, fate, or whatever one might choose to describe the inexplicable, plays in filmmaking. In relation to one of his favorite scenes in the movie, he describes the way the dust envelops one of the kidnap victims, Carla, at the edge of a cliff, when she is released towards the end of the film. Describing the cloud of dust as on of many "miracles in the movie," he further explains:

> The dust just comes up for no reason. No special effects, no planning... The accidents, the miracles that happens [sic], that's part of making something you know, that you believe in. That when you see those things, you really feel like, shit… there is something that's conducting this boat, driving this boat. There's something that's really letting me do something that's bigger than I am. That's when you feel that what you're doing is right.[151]

In addition to supporting Jakubowicz's development as a filmmaker, encouraging his collaboration with Condito, and providing additional crew, postproduction facilities, and finances necessary to complete the film, Avellán provided numerous insights that enabled the making of *Secuestro Express*. While those insights are not all tangible things that are easily documented, they are the kinds of things that are essential to making movies, in particular when there are limited budgets involved. Louis Black observes that "sometimes just in talking to [Elizabeth] you begin to realize issues that you hadn't thought about covering that you needed to cover." He also notes that often times, people reflect on their accomplishments and Avellán's "fingerprints" become visible only long after she has been involved. It becomes clear: "Oh yeah, Elizabeth helped make that happen.'"[152] Avellán was instrumental to both recognizing and

[151] Jonathan Jakubowicz, "Feature Commentary," *Secuestro Express*, directed by Jonathan Jakubowicz (2005; New York, NY: Miramax Films, 2006), DVD.

[152] Black, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

creating opportunities for talented people to work together and make film history in the production of *Secuestro Express*. That is, she was instrumental in creating the synergy responsible for the groundbreaking film.

Secuestro Express is the first Venezuelan film in the democratic era (since 1958) to be made without state funding.[153] It received unprecedented support from the Venezuelan population in that it is not only the highest grossing Venezuelan film of all time, having remained in the number one position for seven weeks, but that success is, in part, due to the fact that even the film pirates in the country were behind the film. They refused to sell illegal copies for at least a month, forcing audiences to support the film at the theaters with their *bolívares* (Venezuelan currency).[154] As previously mentioned, *Secuestro Express* is also the first Venezuelan film to be acquired by a distributor in the United States (Miramax), and as such exposed audiences to Latino "issues" and content that might not otherwise reach them through the mainstream.

Avellán notes that it was Condito's "stroke of genius" that got the Weinsteins interested in the film. Condito had noted there would be an opportunity for Bob Weinstein to attend a screening of the film following an American Film Market (AFM) meeting she knew he would attend. Although Avellán remembers she was not required to be at the event, Condito knew that if she, Rodriguez, and Avellán indicated they were going to a festival screening of the new film after the event, Weinstein would want to join the crowd to see what they had been up to, which he did, and that led Miramax distributing the film.

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[153] Hernandez, "*Secuestro Express*," 187.

[154] Ana Marrie de la Fuente, "Venezuela lays down law," *Variety*, September 4-10, 2006, 9. It is also important to note that while the public supported the film, the Venezuelan government did not, due to the depiction of corruption and drug use in the film.

With a relatively unknown crew, but somewhat more known cast, the trailer to the *Secuestro Express* highlighted one of its most recognizable assets, Elizabeth Avellán, though not by name: "From the producer of *Sin City* and *Once Upon a Time In Mexico*." Avellán has a pattern of producing high quality entertainment and, in addition to the work of the director with whom she is most closely associated, perhaps the tagline signals a shift towards recognizing the important role that producers play in the creation of quality films (or at least it may signal that the connection can and should be made).

Conclusion

Avellán entered filmmaking producing her husband's work, and the couple quickly transitioned from making independent films to working within the Hollywood industry. A driving force in the Texas film community, together they have helped bring Latina/o talent and themes into the mainstream on a national (and international) level with great financial success.[155] Avellán did begin exploring her own interests in independent and documentary films, less motivated by commercial interests and more by artistic and social concerns, with filmmakers such as Rana Joy Glickman and Jacqueline Liebman early in her career, but with the exception of these few films, she has long hesitated to work on any projects that would take her energies away from Rodriguez's films. *Secuestro Express* represents a major departure from that pattern. Even in this instance, however, Avellán and her fellow filmmakers deliberately made the entire film without Rodriguez's knowledge. They did not want for him to feel as though they "weren't

[155] According to the South by Southwest Festival, Troublemakers' genre and family films have grossed over a billion dollars, to date. See Avellán's biography for the panel, "Diversity Counts: Auteurs, Actors and Audiences," in which she participated: "SX Schedule," South by Southwest, accessed April 12, 2011, http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event_FP12246.

giving 150% to his movies."[156]

At this point in her career, Avellán explains that it is important for her to have side projects where she can explore her own interests, and she is doing so through EYA Productions, which she established after the couple's divorce. Avellán is clear that EYA projects are distinct from the work she does at Troublemaker Studios in that they have a different flavor and do not fit the profile of films that Troublemaker set out to make, nor are they projects in which Rodriguez would have an interest or in which Avellán feels he should be involved. Avellán has great pride in EYA films such as *Blacktino*, *Entre Líneas*, and *When Angels Sing* (expected release 2012). The projects often explore issues of social significance head on, in ways that Troublemaker projects generally do not. Avellán's experience with kids' action movies and horror films, which she gained through Troublemaker, remains relevant to EYA, and she has been working with Austin locals, Kristoffer Aaron Morgan and Eric Vespe, on their horror project, *The Home*, which takes place in a skilled nursing facility.

When asked if she considers herself a creative person, Avellán says, "Well, I am. I am creative. It's just that in this world here, [Robert's] so creative, what am I gonna tell him?" Avellán notes that the EYA projects she has been working on have allowed her to "exercise those muscles" (meaning her creative muscles) much more than she has in the past. She gives the example of *When Angels Sing*, a Christmas movie directed by Tim McCanlie and starring Harry Connick, Jr., which is currently in post-production, to illustrate the point. Avellán says that being involved with the music and editing has been a "wonderful, creative… time for me and my other producers along with the director." Together, they have found ways to highlight the strong performances and make certain segments of the film play "smoother." Generally speaking, she

[156] King, "'Secuestro Express': Jonathan Jakubowicz and Elizabeth Avellán."

says, it is what producers do – they facilitate making the most "cohesive, smooth film" possible. That involves a number of tasks, including matching the right talent with each other, as well as matching the best talent to the proper task. Knowing, for example, when it is time to bring in a new editor who has a different set of skills and specialties, can make a significant difference in terms of how a film plays for an audience.

In terms of this creative aspect of Avellán's career, Glickman notes that "so much of her day is taken up with real world, pragmatic stuff, that people don't think how she spends her time is out of the box." As Glickman explains, however, "It's that concept of, 'it takes one to know one….'"[157] According to this logic, in order to recognize talented, out of the box thinkers, it follows that Avellán, herself, is in fact, an out of the box thinker, as well. Avellán not only recognizes and facilitates creative thinking and filmmaking, she is willing to take the risks necessary to develop innovative projects, committing herself to negotiating and coordinating all available resources to bring her directors' visions to life.

Together, Avellán's ability to juggle multiple tasks at once, along with her gift for recognizing talented people, and establishing their trust, has enabled her to assemble a reliable team of creative people who will get the job done. As Danny Trejo, an actor who regularly appears in Troublemaker's films explained in a tribute video to Avellán, her multitasking skills are exceptional. He recounts an instance when Avellán interrupted him to tell one of her crew, "Move that lady in the yellow. She doesn't look right," during a conversation they were having. He explains, "Anybody else, I would have thought that they weren't listening."[158] Avellán, however, is different. In the same tribute video, Mary Shelton echoes Trejo's sentiments when

[157] Glickman, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, October 7, 2011.

[158] *2007 Texas Film Hall of Fame Awards*.

she says, "I don't think anyone can multitask the way Elizabeth can." Whether dealing with studio heads, agents, her cast, or her own children, Avellán juggles her duties with grace while making everyone feel like an important part of the family. By bringing the right people, ideas, and resources together at the right times and in the right way, she facilitates collaboration. While films are not products of collaboration only, the more collaborative the process, the more likely the final product will conform to one vision and be experienced by an audience as if it were exactly that: collaboration on a single vision.

Avellán remembers the time during which sound, picture, and editing work was being done on *Desperado*, *Four Rooms*, and *From Dusk Till Dawn* as one significant to her understanding the importance of a positive work environment. She says:

> The neat thing was the camaraderie that happened in that house… my brother Joaquin came and lived with us and he was helping cut picture too… You know, he'd make risotto and… this kitchen, it was just lively. It's one of the most incredible experiences… and so I realized that there was something to be said about that sort of an environment for the people you work with, you know? Creating a space that was shared.[159]

Avellán has a gift for recognizing people with talents who will compliment one another, but equally important, she knows how to create environments in which those relationships will thrive in order to make the best film for the least amount of money possible, ensuring financial success as well as the ability to continue making films in which she believes.

In combination, Avellán's and Rodriguez's visions have resulted in a string of hugely successful films. While her efforts to maintain as much creative control over her projects as possible depend upon her good business sense and facility with money, her financial concerns are not the driving force behind her success. It is the generosity and commitment she shows the

[159] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

"film family" she has created, as well as that she shows to anyone with whom she comes into contact, that is the driving force. While Avellán is certainly proud of her success, her life's work is about much more than the legacy of her films. She says:

> It's just about humanity. When I die… it's gonna be about my body of work, but I don't want it to be, "She was just a producer, a mother of six children." I want it to be, "She left a legacy of mentoring, a legacy of being present and that when she required you to be a certain way she was that way herself." You know, I don't ask anyone to be anything but what I'm trying to be an example of, and that's a hard one.[160]

In an industry where finished films represent enormous financial risks and lead producers, studio executives, and investors to seek filmmakers, themes, genres, and storytelling techniques that have a proven to return large profits, producers willing to take risks on new talent with new stories to tell and with the kind of resources Avellán has to support those voices are few and far between. Even more rare is the humility and selflessness with which Avellán approaches her work and her fellow filmmakers, illustrated by the thanks she gave after receiving the Ann Richards Award at the 2007 Texas Film Hall of Fame Awards. In addition to thanking God, her Weinstein, Austin, and Mexico film families and Rodriguez, who she thanked for developing his own talents while also encouraging her to develop hers, Avellán said the following: "to the ones who I have mentored and helped along the way… thank you for allowing me to mother you a bit. And as you know, I ask for nothing in return except that you be excellent at whatever you choose to do."[161]

Avellán continually encourages and inspires excellence from those around her, and as she continues to diversify, there is no doubt that many of the new voices she enables will also change the way films are made and understood. She continues to make films with Rodriguez at

[160] Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[161] *2007 Texas Film Hall of Fame Awards*.

Troublemaker Studios (they are currently in pre-production on the sequels to both *Sin City* and *Machete* (2010), for example), as well as with Sandra Condito, who is Avellán's business partner at EYA. Avellán's commitment to working with women is further evidenced by her recent involvement with two unnamed women who aim to establish a producer-centered studio similar to the original Miramax Studios, that would support what Avellán calls "smart, responsible, producer-centered products"[162] like those EYA has recently been making. Avellán is helping to raise the funds for the new venture, which she hopes will yield return in that EYA may be able to funnel at least one project through the new studio per year. They have already expressed interest in distributing *Blacktino* and Avellán sees enormous potential for both herself and many other well-established producers who are eager to work with the women and their studio, should the project come to fruition.

When Rodriguez and Avellán established Troublemaker Studios, they changed the way filmmaking is done. They minimized costs, which allowed them to maintain more creative control over their own projects, which in turn allowed them to turn their interest to increasing the presence of Latinas/os in film (among others) and making it a reality. They created a movie-making machine outside of Hollywood. As someone who has proven herself and developed a loyal network of colleagues, Avellán now aims to utilize the power and connections she has established to change the game even more.

Establishing a pipeline for producer-driven (rather than director-driven) projects, with female executives at the helm would likely benefit women, Latinas/os, and a number of underrepresented populations who otherwise lack access to the industry. For as the following case study of the making of *Chasing Papi* will show, working within the system, as-is, can

[162] Avellán, telephone interview by Mirasol Riojas.

present numerous obstacles to those same populations, even when they occupy key creative positions on the films on which they work. Chon Noriega notes that it is necessary to increase the number of writers and directors, and as well as other behind-the-scenes talent if the hope is to improve the depiction of Latinas/os in film.[163] As one of the writers/producers of *Chasing Papi*, Laura Angélica Simón emphasizes, it is also necessary to employ more Latinas/os in executive positions in order to improve representation on-screen, for the impact executives have on the creative process from which images of Latinas/os in Hollywood films are born can be enormous.

With filmmakers like Avellán working on big budget Hollywood films and nurturing emerging filmmakers in the independent scene, change, while slow, is something currently taking place. Avellán and a small number of producers like her are steadily garnering power to change the way things are done, as well as increase the availability of diverse images to which audiences have access. Her willingness to take risks on new voices and methods of storytelling is something not easy to find in a producer with so many resources necessary to bring a film to fruition. The confidence she has in her own creative judgment and the trust she consequently places in the filmmakers she carefully chooses to support are equally rare and vital to the development of new stories waiting to be heard. The following case study of the making of *Chasing Papi* is an example of what can happen without such a figure to facilitate commitment to a single vision, as well as the ways in which the Hollywood system is resistant to taking risks on the unknown, so necessary for women and people of color to make inroads where they have previously had few opportunities. Considering Hollywood's resistance to change and its tendency towards formulaic stories that ensure commercial success while reproducing the status

[163] Kevin Martinez, "Boyle Heights Beat: East L.A. Residents Claim Hollywood Depicts Latinos Solely in Stereotypes," The Huffington Post: Latino Voices, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/11/hollywood-stereotypes-depictions-of-latinos-east-los-angeles_n_1415238.html.

quo, locating sources of power like Avellán is significant for artists seeking creative freedom to tell new stories and for populations that suffer for lack of representation.

Chapter Four

Fox(y) Latinas and *Chasing Papi* (2003): Trying to Sell Ketchup in a Salsa Bottle

Historically grounded within the context of the move towards big-budget productions during the 1980s, Christine List's book, *Chicano Images: Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film*,[1] explains that the budgets of films by people of color tend to be low, and the films, themselves, are assumed by the industry to appeal to only a small audience. These films, therefore, have historically not received the marketing and advertising support that might otherwise secure their success. As a consequence, List argues, people of color (Chicanos included) often shoulder enormous pressure to produce large-scale, commercial films that are financially successful, while their resources are minimal in comparison to other mainstream films.

List notes that Chicanas have been excluded from the process of making feature films even more than their male counterparts, and so her study of mainstream American films made by Chicanos focuses on textual analysis of films by men. Her work, however, sheds new light on the way that Chicanos have used conventional techniques to their favor (specifically, she focuses on narrative techniques, the reworking of stereotypes, the creation of Chicano counter myths that center on Chicano heroes, and the reworking of generic conventions), within the context of mainstream commercial film. The following case study of *Chasing Papi* (2003)[2] illustrates the ways in which Chicana/Latina filmmakers making Latina-themed films have been able (or not been able, as the case may be) to do the same, as they have increasingly gained access to feature filmmaking opportunities and begun to penetrate the mainstream, since List's 1996 study.

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[1] Christine List, *Chicano Images. Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film* (New York: Garland, 1996).

[2] *Chasing Papi*, directed by Linda Mendoza (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2003).

Although the opportunities for Chicano filmmakers who worked in the short period during which "Hispanic Hollywood" thrived have since waned, the presence of Latina/o culture and personalities in mainstream film and media has not. As the Latina/o population continues to grow, advertisers are recognizing the possibilities of not only targeting Spanish-speaking Hispanics through Spanish language advertising and broadcasting, which fueled the rise of the Hispanic advertising industry during the 1990s, but they are increasingly recognizing the purchasing power of English-dominant households with disposable incomes. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, at the time *Chasing Papi* was made, Hispanics made up "13% of the U.S. population and 15% of movie audiences… Yet Hollywood [put] out about one commercial Hispanic film a year."[3] In 2003 (the year *Chasing Papi* was released), Creative Artists Agency's (CAA's) Christy Haubegger (who was also an associate producer on *Chasing Papi*) was quoted in *Advertising Age* as reporting that English-speaking households earned approximately $20,000 more than Spanish-dominant households.[4]

In 1998, Fox 2000 President Laura Ziskin recognized the opportunity to tap into this growing market of English-dominant Hispanics with increasing amounts of expendable income and she took a risk on writer/producer Laura Angélica Simón's idea for a movie intended specifically for U.S. Latinas. Simón's *Papi Chulo* would become the film known as *Chasing Papi*, which was made during the late 1990s/early 2000s, a time during which several independently produced, Latina-themed, romantic comedies by Latina filmmakers were enjoying a good deal of success. Some successful titles include, *I Like it Like That* (Darnell Martin, 1994),

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[3] Scott Bowles, "Things are Looking Up for Disney's *Holes*," *USA Today*, April 21, 2003, 1D. By 2005, Nielsen Research Group reportedly found, "Hispanics make up 14.1% of the U.S. population, but accounted for 17% of admissions." In addition, they saw an average of 7.6 films per year, which is more than whites, blacks, or "other groups." See Chris Gardner, "Mi Casa, Su Windfall?" *Variety*, July 31-August 6, 2006, 1.

[4] Laurel Wentz, "New Gig: Haubegger," *Advertising Age*, February 10, 2003, 13.

The 24 Hour Woman (Nancy Savoca, 1999), *Rum and Coke* (Maria Escobedo, 2000), *Luminarias* (José Luis Valenzuela, 2000), *The Blue Diner* (Jan Egleson, 2001), and *Tortilla Soup* (María Ripoll, 2001). Studios also experimented with mainstream Latina-themed romantic comedies such as *Fools Rush In* (Andy Tennant, 1997) and *Maid in Manhattan* (Wayne Wang, 2002) with moderate success, though the key creative positions on these studio projects were filled by non-Latinas. In addition, released just a few months before *Chasing Papi*, the Latina-themed and –made drama, *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002) proved that Latina filmmakers and content could be both commercially and critically successful. It was within this context that the low budget (approximately $10 million) film, *Chasing Papi* was made, as an attempt to both tap into the emerging audience for Latina-themed and –made films, as well as to reach the ever-elusive Latina/o audience.

Fox assembled an impressive team of talent to make *Chasing Papi*, which was marketed as "the first major studio comedy to reflect the Hispanic cultural experience in America."[5] A number of the filmmakers had proven track records in a variety of media and different genres, including three Latinas from the film, television, and print media industries, respectively: writer/producer, Laura Angélica Simón; director, Linda Mendoza; and associate producer, Christy Haubegger. The three women, however, rarely had occasion to work together during the production of the film, if at all.[6] Like Avellán and Rodriguez, discussed in the previous chapter, the Latina filmmakers behind *Chasing Papi* aimed to create an entertaining film that would be both financially successful and star a Latina/o cast. The creative control they had to develop and

[5] Bernadette Marie Calafell and Shane T. Moreman's unpublished article, "*Chasing Papi,* Chasing Authenticity: Creating the 'Latino' Film," as quoted in "Roundtable Issue: Conversations about Race and Ethnicity in Advertising," in *Advertising and Society Review* 6.2 (2005).

[6] There may have been other Latinas employed in the production of this film, but for the purposes of this study, I am focusing on the Latinas that held key creative positions, above the line.

market the Latina-themed film in ways that made sense to them, however, was limited by the studio in its attempt to safeguard its investment in this risky project. Where Avellán and Rodriguez entered the Hollywood scene with a successful feature film that put them in a position to demand a certain amount of freedom and eventually acquire the resources necessary to create a self-sufficient studio far from Hollywood influences, *Chasing Papi* is very much a product of the synergy created by the studio that made the film, and is proof of what journalist Chris Garnder has noted with regard to Latina/o film audiences: "While execs in Hollywood see the potential, they are grappling with the specifics."[7]

As Elizabeth Avellán noted in the previous chapter, having studio executives who looked beyond her identity as a woman, a wife, a Latina, and any stereotypes that might be associated with those identities, has been crucial to her establishing the trust necessary for her to do her job, successfully. In her endeavors with Troublemakers Studios, EYA, and the other independent films on which she has worked, Avellán has had the foresight and good fortune to create and become involved in situations in which the films are subject to a minimal amount of scrutiny by outside forces, most notably, the studios. Most Latina/o filmmakers, however, do not enjoy such fortuitous working conditions. The following case study of *Chasing Papi* investigates a more traditional model of making films in the Hollywood system. It represents the studio's already difficult task of "grappling" with how to reach the Latina/o audience with Latina-themed content, which was further complicated about midway through the development process, when a change in studio management led to significant changes in the studio's approach to the film. A story that was initially conceptualized as a comedy that would explore the culturally specific experiences of three very different Latinas, the screenplay, *Papi Chulo*, underwent a very tumultuous

[7] Chris Gardner, "Mi Casa, Su Windfall?" *Variety*, July 31-August 6, 2006, 1.

development process before finally becoming what audiences know as the film, *Chasing Papi*.[8] Rather than depict the cultural nuances of the Latina/o experience in the United States, so central to the original story, new management employed an unusually large number of creative people to transform the script into something that would target a much larger audience by appealing to a pan-ethnic form of Latino identity, which has been successfully utilized by U.S. Hispanic marketing and advertising industries. As Katynka Zazueta Martínez reported, "By 2001, U.S. Census figures suggested that Latinos, as a pan-ethnic construct, could indeed be viewed as a worthwhile market."[9] This was the direction the studio began to take. The intent of making a film for the Hispanic audience was not consistent throughout development, production, and post-production of the film, nor was the way in which the Hispanic audience was defined. As the studio grew increasingly nervous about the risk it was taking on the film and the unproven market, it shifted its approach to the material and the audience, while hoping to maintain its appeal to the original intended audience.

Fox enlisted the services of numerous "experts" and/or "authorities" with proven success in a variety of genres and niche markets in an attempt to ensure *Chasing Papi*'s success with not only Latina/o audiences, but with as many audiences as possible, and the film does boast an unusually diverse cast and crew, both behind the scenes and on-screen. Actor D.L. Hugley, who played a small time crook in the film, has commented on the diversity of the cast and crew during production. Whether impressed by the fact that make-up artists knew how to do his hair or appreciating that so many people of color "ordinarily…wouldn't all be in the same universe at

[8] The final title, *Chasing Papi* will be used throughout the remainder of the discussion of the film, for simplicity's sake, no matter what stage of development is being discussed.

[9] Katynka Zazueta Martínez, "Latina Magazine and the Invocation of a Panethnic Family: Latino Identity as It Is Informed by Celebrities and Papis Chulos," *The Communication Review* 7:2 (April 1, 2004): 171.

the same time," he noted the diversity was both unusual and also beneficial to the production.[10] However, it is important to distinguish between employing figures who wield decision-making power above the line, and crewing up with a diverse range of individuals to execute a film; for as Simón indicates, during the development process, she was actually "annoyed at the lack of Latinos in the creative group."[11] In addition, *Chasing Papi* did not, in the end, reflect the ethnic diversity within the Hispanic community, on-screen. Rather, the studio attempted to represent "*the* [author's emphasis] Hispanic cultural experience," and not the wide range of experiences that characterize the Latina/o community, as initially intended.

Chasing Papi had a disappointing opening weekend[12] and overall, was not the commercial or critical success for which the filmmakers and studios had hoped. Unfortunately, the film's "failure" continues to haunt some of the filmmakers involved in the project. As I will show, the (Latina) filmmakers have born an undue amount of credit/blame for their contributions to the film, as the studio that hired them for their specific areas of expertise underutilized their talents, knowledge, and resources. It is difficult to judge the filmmakers' proficiency in their areas of expertise due to the complexity of the development process and confusion about the vision and goals of the film among various creative centers. What has escaped viewers and critics is that the inconsistencies exhibited on-screen were not necessarily a direct result of the creative decisions made by the filmmakers involved in the project, but were largely a

[10] Daniel Chang, "'Papi Chulo' Will Venture into Uncharted Territory," *Houston Chronicle* 2 Star Edition, August 24, 2002, 9

[11] Laura Angélica Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Los Angeles, California, March 7, 2012.

[12] According to *Variety*, the film debuted on 585 screens, and came in eleventh on opening weekend, earning $2, 404, 577 at the box office. See "Box Office," compiled by Anthony D'Alessandro, *Variety,* April 28 – May 4, 2003, 16.

manifestation of the confusion behind the scenes and the manner in which the various elements of the film came together.

The following study shows that in the case of *Chasing Papi*, synergistic authorship grew less out of a collaborative process, but rather, was the studio's attempt to unify disparate elements into a cohesive product as filmmakers negotiated their own and what they understood as others' and the studio's visions of the film. The filmmakers and executives responsible for making the creative decisions about the film had different goals throughout the different stages of the process, which often conflicted with one another. The result was a lack of clarity with regard to the vision of the "whole" picture, so vital to the success of any film, and that lack of clarity is evidenced on the screen.

The film received overwhelmingly harsh and unflattering reviews, such as that by Marty Clear of *The St. Petersburg Times*, who declared it full of "logical inconsistencies… a mess of a film."[13] Even the small number of critics who focused on the strengths of the film rather than its flaws made note of the problem. For example, *Daily Variety*'s Lael Loewenstein, who praised the musical score, as well as the production and costume design, also noted the film's "many inconsistencies,"[14] among other flaws. This case study illustrates the importance of effectively coordinating talent that compliment one another, as well as creating environments that encourage clear communication and collaboration around a unified vision in order to produce a film. It also illustrates the detrimental effects that studio regime changes can have on the creative process of making a film.

[13] Marty Clear, "'Papi' is pure pap," *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), April 17, 2012, 12W.

[14] Lael Loewenstein, "Chasing Papi," *Daily Variety*, April 16, 2003, 18.

As *Variety*'s Chris Gardner has noted, although there has been support for some Latina/o films, when a few have failed at the box office, "Hollywood has moved on in search of a new quadrant."[15] An example of the phenomenon Gardner describes, *Chasing Papi*'s "failure" has also since served as a warning to other studios and investors who might attempt to reach the elusive Hispanic audience by taking risks on new voices and methods of storytelling. The consequences of misunderstanding film authorship in this case go far beyond debilitating individual careers. They affect the opportunities and representation of the entire Latina/o community.

The Three Latinas On-Screen

Chasing Papi is the story of three very different Latinas – Cici, Lorena, and Patricia – who are dating the same man, Tomás. Cici is a loud, voluptuous waitress from Miami, who dreams of being a dancer. The intellectual of the bunch, Lorena practices law in Chicago and is a champion of "the people," early shown to be repressing her sexuality. Patricia, a light skinned Latina from New York, is rich, spoiled, suffocated by her family, and shown to be uncomfortable with her Hispanic heritage.

When all three women suspect that Tomás is cheating on them, each travels to Los Angeles to investigate. The women run into each other at Tomás's home and discover the truth about how he has been deceiving them. Tomás takes several tranquilizers in order to calm his nerves and when he chases the pills with alcohol, he passes out. The women drag their unconscious boyfriend around town, waiting for him to awake, and in the process, they embark on a journey of self-discovery. They become friends and in the end, decide they do not need Tomás, who is

[15] Gardner, "Mi Casa, Su Windfall?"

left alone. His next romantic prospect, however, Carmen (an FBI agent who has been following the group throughout the movie) is clearly in view.

Three Latinas Behind the Scenes

Like *Chasing Papi*'s three Latina protagonists, who come from very different backgrounds, geographic areas, and economic and social standings, the Latina filmmakers involved with the making of this film are also very different from one another. Writer/producer Laura Angélica Simón, associate producer Christy Haubegger, and director Linda Mendoza, had all demonstrated success in different areas of the media/entertainment industry upon hire. Together, they represent a convergence of diverse media connections and resources, as well as a wide variety of social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Each filmmaker represented a distinct asset for the studio.

Laura Angélica Simón (Writer/Producer)

At the time Fox bought her pitch for *Chasing Papi*, Simon was an up-and-coming filmmaker who had just received a tremendous amount of attention for her first documentary film, *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* (1997).[16] Because she was employed as an elementary school teacher when she made her first film, she has consistently been referred to as a schoolteacher-turned-filmmaker in both the trades and the press.[17] Simón, however, did have several years of experience and training in film before she became a teacher.

[16] *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary,* directed by Laura Angélica Simón (Hohokus, NJ: Transit Media, 1997).

[17] Ines Pinto Alicea, "Laura Angelica Simon - Teacher and Filmmaker; First Documentary a Winner at Sundance," *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* vol. 9, iss. 20 (Jun 18, 1999): 24.

Shortly after completing her college education, Simón sought work through a temporary agency and was placed at 20th Century Fox. She worked in the development area of production under Scott Rudin and Amy Pascal, where she spent her time reading scripts, giving notes, and learning about the development process. Her passion for film developed here and Simón spent a lot of time on film sets, as well as taking film production classes at local colleges and universities, to develop her skills.[18] She was eventually offered a full time position as a development officer at Fox, but declined the position in order to pursue other career opportunities (namely, teaching). When her then-roommate secured a job at Disney and encouraged her to apply for the Walt Disney Writing Fellowship, Simón submitted an application and was awarded the very competitive and prestigious award. She gained writing experience at Disney and was encouraged to develop her comedy writing skills, including numerous assignments writing for Bette Midler. Although she felt the experience was rewarding, Simón found the business side of the industry distasteful, and so returned to teaching. Her long-term plans included traveling to South America, as well as to returning to graduate school.

It was during this time as a teacher at Hoover Elementary, while she was saving money and preparing for her trip, that California Proposition 187 was passed. Proposition 187 denied undocumented children access to the public education system and a variety of social services. Born in Mexico and having immigrated to the United States with her parents, as a child, Simón, has assimilated into the American culture and way of life, but identifies strongly with the immigrant experience. She told Maria Shriver in a 1997 episode of *Dateline*, in relation to her documentary, *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, that she felt, "I am these kids. I'm just a

[18] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas. Simón remembers taking courses at UCLA Extension and/or Los Angeles Community College, and believes Fox may have even paid for her training, but she does not recall the details.

few years away from them."[19] Under proposition 187, schoolteachers were expected to submit lists of students they suspected were undocumented to the school administration. When one of her students asked if Simón now functioned as a police officer, she decided to use her extensive camera skills to document the historical moment.[20] She and her romantic/producing partner, Tracey Trench, invested their combined life-savings of approximately $130,000, into the project.

Simón's old connections at Fox and Disney proved invaluable, as they provided production materials and facilities for the film. As Simón explained to *Variety*'s Kathy McDonald, "20th Century Fox helped with the post-production, the sound mix was done by Fox staff. Every technical support person said yes to helping us and everyone did it for free."[21] Several Fox executives, in fact, including Chairman Bill Mechanic and President Tom Sherak, invested their own monies and supported the completion of the film,[22] and Disney donated all of the videotape Simón required.[23]

The film stirred up a good amount of controversy and although Simón received numerous offers from the book, film, and television industries after *Fear and Learning* won Sundance's 1997 Freedom of Expression Award, not all responses to the film were positive. Simón's visibility on campus made her vulnerable and she received numerous hostile letters and phone calls, which eventually led to her being let go by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Upon losing her job, she says felt she had no option but to return to writing for a living.[24]

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[19] *Dateline,* "Fear and Learning," first broadcast June 29, 1997 on NBC.

[20] Simón, Laura Angélica. "*NBC News Today,"* interview with Matt Lauer [c.a. 1997]. *Director's Reel*. DVD.

[21] Kathy McDonald, "Doc Makers Uncover LA Realities," *Variety*, November 17-23, 1997, 14.

[22] Michael Quintanilla, "A Teacher's Dedication to Immigrant Kids," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1997, 3.

[23] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[24] Ibid.

Simón began working on the story for *Chasing Papi*, speculatively (or "on spec") in hopes that it would sell to one of the studios. In that sense, she might be considered "the woman behind" the film. Inspired by the summers she spent observing her cousins watch the *papis, mangos,* and *chulitos* (good looking boys) in cafés in Mexico, often fighting over the very same ones,[25] Simón aimed to write a story that was both "authentic" and grounded in pop culture. The story she wanted to tell revolved around a Mexican woman, a Cuban woman, and a Puerto Rican woman all fighting over the same man. Simón imagined it would be a hybrid of *9 to 5* (1980) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), a film that she conceptualized as a Latino version of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002).

Simón is credited as one of the script's four writers and shares credit for the story with Steve Antin.[26] She was also one of several producers on the film, but explains she increasingly lost control over the film (first as a writer and then as producer), particularly after Laura Ziskin left Fox at the end of 1999, when her five-year contract expired.[27] Eventually, she says, she was relieved of her duties as both a writer and producer, entirely.

Christy Haubegger (Associate Producer)

Christy Haubegger is best known as the founder and publisher of *Latina*, a successful magazine aimed at young Latinas in the United States. Born to a Mexican woman and brought

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[25] Laura Angélica Simón, letter to the WGA arbitration committee, September 17, 2002, Laura Angélica Simón, personal papers.

[26] In all, there were at least seven writers who worked on the script: Laura Angélica Simón, Steve Antin, Sara Parriott, Josanna McGibbon, Sylvio Horta, Elizabeth Sarnoff, and Alison Balian. Disputes among the writers on the project triggered a Writers Guild of America (WGA) arbitration hearing, which resulted in the screenplay being credited to Simón, Antin, Sarnoff, and Balian, while the story is credited to Simón and Antin, alone.

[27] Chris Petrikin, "Fox Looks Within for New Studio Execs," *Variety*, November 8 – November 14, 1999, 9.

up by adoptive Anglo parents in Houston, Texas, Haubegger's parents always encouraged her to connect with her Mexican-American heritage. She early recognized, however, that her experience was not reflected in the images or writings she found in the magazines she read as a youth. As Stuart Hall notes, cultural identity is "a matter of becoming as well as being," and reflects the various ways people have been positioned as well as how they position themselves in relation to the past. Any unearthing of a cultural identity, he says, requires "the act of imaginative rediscovery," for identity is always in a state of representation.[28] Haubegger's process of "imaginative rediscovery" is further complicated by the lack of Mexican-American influence in her own home, which might have otherwise deviated, on some levels, from the mainstream representations of Latina/o culture found in the media. Haubegger's explained to *Texas Monthly* in 1997 that as a child, "other Hispanic kids were frustrated by a lack of popular images in the media, but at least when they went home, they found people who looked like they did."[29]

Haubegger says that because her parents knew she would encounter racial discrimination in the outside world, they convinced her she was "capable of doing anything – no matter what anyone said." In particular, she notes that her mother, brother, and a lawyer for whom she did research during her last year of high school were strong role models who encouraged her to be a strong woman and pursue her goal of being a lawyer. Haubegger's own supportive family constantly reinforced her potential and provided her emotional support as well as resources in order to succeed. She says she early knew:

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[28] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 706.

[29] "Christy Haubegger: Pioneering Magazine Founder," in *Contemporary Hispanic Biography: Profiles from the International Hispanic Community* vol. 1, project ed. Ashyia N. Henderson (Detroit: Gale, 2002), 98.

> somehow I was going to do something different to address girls my age and older who were told by society that they couldn't be leaders, or doctors, or lawyers. What I have always wanted to do was create a forum in which the Hispanic success story can be told, a place where women can identify with their potential to become doctors, or lawyers, or astronauts.[30]

Haubegger explains about her youth, "Had some of my teachers and the people I really looked up to told me how powerful I was, how much potential I had, my self-esteem and whole identity would have been strengthened tenfold."[31]

After earning a law degree from Stanford University, Haubegger founded *Latina* magazine to do just that, assisting Latinas in navigating their own ethnic/cultural identity. A joint venture with the African-American owned *Essence* magazine, *Latina* began as a bi-monthly publication in 1996 and went monthly within a year. By 2000, it boasted close to 1 million readers as well as a seventy percent increase in yearly advertising.[32] Healthy circulation and the popularity of the magazine's content are certainly important to the success of the publication. However, as Susan Aschoff noted in 1999, "the survival of Latina rides on Haubegger's unflinching pitch to advertisers,"[33] a skill which made her very valuable to Fox.

Solera LLC now owns Latina Media Ventures but Haubegger does remain on the board of *Latina* magazine. The success of the magazine has enabled her to expand her efforts into the

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[30] Ibid., 180-181.

[31] Haubegger, Christy, "An Idea of My Own," in *Girls Like Us: 40 Extraordinary Women Celebrate Girlhood in Story, Poetry, and Song*, ed. Gina Misiroglu (Novato, CA: New world Library, 1998), 180.

[32] Vyvyan Tenorio, "Solera Capital puts up $20M for Latina Publications," *Daily Deal* (New York, New York), Private Equity Section, November 14, 2000.

[33] Susan Aschoff, "The Face of the Future is Latina," *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), August 6, 1999, Floridian section, 1D.

realm of books[34] and film. In addition to her role as associate producer of *Chasing Papi*, she was also an executive producer on the 2004 film, *Spanglish*, directed by James L. Brooks. Haubegger is currently employed by CAA, where she assists marketing clients in their efforts to target the Hispanic audience. As CAA's Richard Lovett has said with regard to Haubegger, he believes, "no one better understands and appreciates the trends, values and desires of the Hispanic market."[35]

Linda Mendoza (Director)

Chasing Papi's director, Linda Mendoza, was born to and raised by Mexican parents in Detroit, Michigan. Mendoza says that growing up, she remembers only one other Latino at her school, and he was not in her class. There were so few Latinas/os in her environment that Mendoza says she never considered their countries of origin, but rather, simply though of them as "Latino." She says, "Everything was more black and white issues, as opposed to brown issues, I guess. I didn't have any of that growing up." Furthermore, she explains that people bonded more around their shared experiences as working-class people: "We were all in it together." One of the things Mendoza felt she brought to *Chasing Papi* was her status as "a working-class Mexican from Detroit," due to what ended up being the emphasis on the distinct social/economic status that marked the three women's difference from one another in the film.

A seasoned television director who has been working in the television industry since the 1980s, Mendoza's credits are dominated by comedies such as, *In Living Color* (1990-1994), *The Chris Rock Show* (1997-2000), *The Bernie Mac Show* (2001-2006), *Scrubs* (2001-2010), and *30*

[34] Haubegger has published one book: Belén Aranda-Alvarado and the editors of *Latina* magazine, *Latina Beauty: A Get Gorgeous Guide for Every Mujer* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2000).

[35] Claude Brodesser, "CAA Hires Haubegger for Hispanic Initiatives," *Daily Variety*, February 14, 2003, 34.

Rock (2006 -), just to name a few. She has worked in a variety of television genres, including sitcoms, comedic dramas, sketch comedy, and live comedy concerts, both single camera and multi camera formats.[36] As *Chasing Papi*'s executive producer, Tajamika Paxton has noted, Mendoza's experience with comedy, "typically a man's medium," make her somewhat of a "phenomenon." As Paxton explains, by choosing Mendoza to direct the film, the hope was to "expand the audience, just expand the tastes a little bit about what female directors can deliver."[37]

Paxton describes Mendoza's hire on *Chasing Papi*, explaining, "Linda was one of the few directors who came in and knew exactly what she wanted to do with it. Exactly."[38] Mendoza had several meetings with Fox executives to discuss her vision of the film and as she remembers, she was clear that she "wanted to make an old-fashioned screwball romantic comedy from the 60s where everybody is just beautiful all the time."[39] Having been raised on old Hollywood films, Mendoza explains she was trying to emulate a "Rock Hudson/Doris Day" kind of feel with the film.[40]

Although *Chasing Papi* marked her feature filmmaking debut,[41] Mendoza's experience

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[36] For a detailed description of the significance of the differences between the two formats, see Mendoza's interview with the Director's Guild of America: Linda Mendoza, "Flying the Coop," *DGA Quarterly* (Winter 2010), accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/0904-Winter-2009-10/Funny-Business-Linda-Mendoza.aspx.

[37] "Special Features: Todo 'Everything' Papi," *Chasing Papi*, directed by Linda Mendoza (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2003), DVD.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Linda Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Los Angeles, California, March 29, 2012.

[41] There are, in fact, several Latinas who work in both film and television. In addition to Mendoza, Darnell Martin and Rose Troche, for example, have also had some success directing in the television industry (though both Troche and Martin began in the film industry, as opposed to Mendoza, who began in television).

with comedy and high-pressure television production schedules made her extremely valuable to Fox, as did her identity as a woman and as a Latina. In addition to the aforementioned asset the studio saw in her status as a woman comedy director, being a woman of Mexican-American descent also proved to be an asset for Mendoza. As she explains, for the Latina-themed film, *Chasing Papi*, "they wanted a Latin female director and there's just not a whole lot of us out there."[42] Mendoza's identity lent authenticity to the project, which could now be marketed as the first studio picture to be directed by a Latina.

Piecing *Papi* Together

While Fox was initially willing to take a risk on a Latina-themed project aimed at a English-dominant Latina/o audience, about which they had very little knowledge, over time the studio became increasingly reliant on old strategies that had been proven to work with the (Spanish-dominant) Hispanic audience. Unable to recognize and/or manage the valuable information about the Latina/o community that the Latina filmmakers they had hired for their specific areas of expertise offered, the studio exhibited limited confidence in the filmmakers while exercising an enormous amount of creative control over the production. Changes in studio management, the addition of several writers and producers, and shifting ideas about the film's vision and target audience complicated the already difficult task of coordinating the people and resources necessary to make a feature film. Although it is inevitable that a good deal will change between the time a film is initially conceptualized and the time it is completed, the following chain of events emphasizes the importance of maintaining and communicating a unified vision of the "whole" film, which is often beyond the sole control of the director.

[42] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

Making the Pitch and Sealing the Deal – The Women Who Got *Papi* Off the Ground

Interested in a comedy that would add diversity to the media landscape that tends towards hard luck Latino-themed films, Simón says that while she certainly appreciates and has written many stories about Latino immigrants, at the time she wrote the script for *Chasing Papi*, she felt, "Nobody's written us [Latinos] funny!" Simón says she never intended for the film to be particularly "profound," but rather, she was intent on making a fun movie grounded in pop culture. While she says she has "no problem making fun of Latinos," it is also important to recognize that her background and experiences as an immigrant to the United States continually inform her creative work. As someone who is very connected to her country of origin, but also assimilated into the American culture and way of life, it was important to Simón that she depict the culturally specific details of the lives of Latinas/os living in the United States. Concerned with social and political issues that affect Latina/o Americans, she says, "There's something subversive in everything I do… comedy always has a political subtext."[43] *Chasing Papi* is no exception. It was, for example, important to Simón that the three women in the film not be working-class, but rather, that they all be either middle-class or wealthy. She also felt it was important that even though the women were chasing a man, they discover themselves along the way, and in the end, not end up with their *papi chulo*. Simón says that while on one level, the characters may have represented stereotypes, on another, she was certain that their journeys would be atypical.

Having been a former executive at Fox and also having recently produced the studio's film, *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998), Simón's partner, Tracy Trench, was in the studio's "very

[43] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

good graces" at the time she approached Ziskin with Simon's idea for *Chasing Papi*. Simón soon secured a meeting with Ziskin, who bought the pitch. One of the very few female senior executives at any of the major studios at that time,[44] Ziskin had previously been an independent producer. When she became a single mother, her interest in a more stable position, in part, prompted her to accept the position at Fox 2000 in 1994.[45] Ziskin explained her hire at Fox as something strategic on the studio's part. Her boss, Bill Mechanic, she said, "made a calculated business decision. He looked at the audience in demographic terms and recognized that more than half were women. [Fox] needed a little oestrogen in the room."[46]

Ziskin's status as a woman filmmaker in a male-dominated business is notable, but it is her reputation for taking on risky projects that is particularly significant with regard to *Chasing Papi*. For example, when the film *Hope Floats* (1998)[47] was being pitched to the studio, Ziskin remembers none of her male colleagues initially supported the project. In the obituary he wrote for Ziskin, who passed away in 2011, Ryan Gilbert quotes her as having said the following about the men present at the aforementioned meeting:

> [They] could not have been less interested…Had I not been in the room, there would have been no one there who was the audience for this movie. It was a moment where I felt quite potent. I stood up and said, "Excuse me, you guys. This is not a movie for you. You don't have to get it. I love this movie and I'm the audience and I'm who you're going to be marketing to." The movie got made and went on to make a lot of money.[48]

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[44] Richard Natale, "Women at Work," *Variety*, Special Report: Special Supplement: Columbia Pictures 75th Anniversary, January 25-31, 1999, 10.

[45] Kathy A. McDonald, "Laura Ziskin," *Daily Variety*, September 20, 2002, A6.

[46] Ryan Gilbey, "Obituary: Laura Ziskin: Hollywood Producer who Helped Break Stranglehold," *The Guardian* (London), June 16, 2011, 39.

[47] *Hope Floats*, directed by Forest Whitaker (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox Film Corporation, 1998). Whitaker, incidentally, plays a significant role in this case study of *Chasing Papi*, as he was brought onto the project as a producer midway through the project, which will be subsequently detailed.

[48] Gilbey, "Obituary: Laura Ziskin."

Ziskin took another risk when she bought the pitch for the Latina-themed film, *Chasing Papi*, and it was agreed that Simón and Trench would produce the film together. Initially, however, Simón was not invited to write the script, despite her interest in doing so and despite her experience as a Disney Writing Fellow, in one of the most prestigious programs in the industry. The search for a writer began, but as Trench indicated in a memo to Ziskin on August 21, 1998, she and Simón had trouble settling on an acceptable writer. Trench indicated the Latino writers they spoke with were either "too dramatic or too soft," and in discussing the project with non-Latino writers, she discovered "there are some serious problems in asking a non-Latino writer to write a Latino project. Most writers know close to nothing about Latino culture in America." More specifically, she explained the takes she had heard on the project from non-Latino writers were "maudlin and dangerously stereotypical."[49] Trench stressed to Ziskin the importance of keeping Latino talent at the "heart of the creative inspiration," should they hope to reach the Latino market with the Latina-driven comedy.

Eventually, in order to make a deal, a compromise was reached so that Simón was allowed to write the script in partnership with another writer. Trench and Fox Vice President Carla Hacken compiled a list of possible writers with which Simón might work. Steve Antin, a former client of Hacken's from her tenure at the talent agency, ICM, was finally chosen. Simón says she looked forward to working with a partner and agreed to the partnership because she recognized she would likely have little luck getting the Latina-themed film made elsewhere, on her own. According to Simón, however, her writing partnership with Antin turned out not to be as cooperative as anticipated, and Simón claims to have written the majority of the script on her

[49] Tracey Trench, memorandum to Laura Ziskin, re: Papi Chulo, August 21, 1998, Laura Angélica Simón, personal papers.

own, while Antin contributed occasional notes on her work.[50] Overall, she indicates she wrote approximately fourteen drafts of the script over the first two years of the process.

Because Simón recognized marketing as one of the largest obstacles to getting a Latino film made in Hollywood, she says she early discussed with the studio the reasons why the film would sell. She explains:

> I brought up that one of the reasons it was possibly gonna crossover in ways that other Latino films had failed was that we were gonna do a Latino film where every race was included. So it wasn't gonna just be a Cuban film or a Puerto Rican film or a Mexican film. It was gonna be all of us and that was gonna be part of the joy of the film. It was include a little bit of all the music, and a little bit of all the cultures and it was gonna be truly a Latino film. And it was gonna have all these nuanced jokes so it was gonna have inside jokes that only we would get. And I remember talking specifically how this was gonna be different.[51]

Simón felt that comedy would be particularly popular with the target audience because while Latinas have access to excellent drama on television through Spanish language *telenovelas*, there was no comedy made for them, nor was there anything that reflected their various levels of assimilation or their experiences as modern women in the U.S. She intended for *Chasing Papi* to address all of these things, cultural specificity being integral to the comedy of the script.

Simón says that generally speaking, response to her work was very positive and she was able to write with little interference, until the film was greenlit. Once it was clear the film was actually going to get made, she indicates, "everybody got mean… that's when everybody started to take it away." Simón says the studio became increasingly concerned about the crossover

[50] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas. As previously mentioned, disputes among other writers on the project triggered a Writers Guild of America (WGA) arbitration hearing. That hearing, in turn, triggered a more in-depth analysis of Simón and Antin's partnership. Simón indicates that initially, the committee ruled in her favor. However, according to Simón, Antin hired a high-powered Hollywood attorney and challenged the ruling, which resulted in its reversal (in Antin's favor). As a result, Simón and Antin share credit for the story and they additionally share credit for the screenplay with Sarnoff and Balian.

[51] Ibid.

potential of the film and her ability to appeal to multiple quadrants (those besides young Latinas and their dates).

Simón says that while the studio was concerned about the work being too culturally specific to appeal to a broad audience, in fact, they had previously expressed concern about her not being authentic enough for the film. Although she is an immigrant, she says she was too assimilated and light skinned for the studio's liking, and her lack of an accent "bothered" them.[52] Executives had previously told her, "We need somebody more authentic in the room." In a memo Trench and Simón wrote to Ziskin, Hacken, and Tracy Silbert, toward the beginning of the development process, Trench and Simón alluded to the studio's concerns over authenticity. They explained that Simón had hoped to act out the first draft of the script for the team but because it was not possible, the team would "have to trust [Trench and Simón] that the film has an authentic Latino feel to it."[53] As time went on, however, the studio became less invested in an "authentic" Latino film, in favor of appealing to what they hoped would attract a larger audience.

Shifts in Regime – Changing the Approach to the Material and the Audience

Ziskin had initially supported Simón's intent to explore the diversity of the Latina experience in terms of their economic status as well as their culturally defining characteristics in a Latina-themed comedy aimed at Latina/o audiences. However, when Ziskin left the studio at the end of 1999, in the middle of the film's development, the change in studio management introduced new personalities to the project, and those individuals had increasingly divergent opinions as to the direction the film should take. Ziskin, Simón says, had not been "afraid" of

[52] Ibid.

[53] Tracy Trench and Laura Simon, memorandum to Laura Ziskin, Carla Hacken, and Tracy Silbert, "Papi Chulo – First Draft," July 10, 1999, Laura Angélica Simón, personal papers.

taking the risks she wanted to take with the film. She was unable to see the film through to completion, however, and was replaced by Elizabeth Gabler, who Simón says proved not to be the ally that she had in her previous executive. Gabler soon hired Forest Whitaker, owner of Spirit Dance Entertainment, as an additional producer on the film, along with the Vice President of Spirit Dance, Tajamika Paxton, who was brought on as an executive producer. Whitaker had recently directed *Waiting to Exhale* (1995) for Fox, which was a critically and commercially successful film aimed at a core demographic of African-American women. Initially, Simón hoped that having Whitaker, an "ethnic" man on the project, would prove helpful in getting an ethnic film made. To her mind, however, the obstacles to getting the film she envisioned made, only grew worse.[54]

As Simón explains, she did not have the same "connection" with Gabler that she had had with Ziskin, and she felt Gabler "didn't know what to do with the script." When Gabler brought Whitaker on to the project, Simón felt a dramatic shift in the course of the film, which she says became "a Forest Whitaker production."[55] The studio began looking towards an increasingly broad audience, rather than the Latino market that had initially been discussed. Whitaker is reported to have been brought onto the project in an effort to secure crossover success and he "shepherded [*Chasing Papi*] with an eye toward wooing both its core demo and other audience segments."[56]

Where the studio had previously expressed concerns over Simón's authenticity, those concerns did not prevent Anglo writers, Sara Parriott and Josanna McGibbon, the writers of *The*

[54] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Loewenstein, "Chasing Papi."

Runaway Bride (1999), from being hired on to the project, soon after Gabler and Whitaker became involved. These were the first two writers who took a pass at the script, and in all, no fewer than five additional writers were involved in rewriting the script (only one of whom was Latino).[57] Simón felt Parriott and McGibbon were not able to write for the distinctly Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican characters, and she says they increasingly removed the cultural specificity of the humor. Instead, they replaced it with what she considered bland, "vapid" jokes that, while not offensive in her opinion, nonetheless resulted in an inauthentic script that became more "diluted" and "stereotypical," as time went on.[58]

Simón remembers being quite verbal about her displeasure on many occasions and says she was eventually relieved of her writing duties, although she continued working on the project as a producer for an additional period of time. As a producer, she continued to voice her concerns, particularly when it came to the lack of knowledge the new writers had with regard to Latina/o culture. Her comments eventually prompted Whitaker to suggest hiring a "Latino consultant" for the set. Simón suggested that instead, they simply have a Latino on the set, rather than a consultant. Soon after, when Whitaker inquired about her opinions on another version of the script, Simón says she responded that she was likely biased because of her involvement with the original versions, but felt it had become "a Latino comedy that's no longer funny or Latino."

Simón says while she had been left out of more and more meetings up until that time, it was after this exchange with Whitaker that she was asked not to return to the production meetings. As Simón remembers it, she had routinely been the only Latina/o in the room and as

[57] Latino writer/producer, Sylvio Horta, who would go on to co-create and executive produce the successful Latina/o-themed television program, *Ugly Betty* (2006 - 2010), also worked on the script, but as Mendoza remembers it, his changes were not incorporated into the final film. It would be two additional Anglo writers, Alison Balian, and Elizabeth Sarnoff, who would finally be credited with the screenplay, along with Simón and Antin.

[58] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

such, she regularly challenged the changes that were being made to the script. She felt she was considered "problematic" by both Gabler and Whitaker and, in this sense, rather than having her authenticity questioned, she feels she was seen as being "too Latina" for the studio's liking. The representations of Latinas/os in *Chasing Papi* must, therefore, be recognized as the result of negotiations between numerous creatives and executives, in numerous stages of the filmmaking process, invested in representing Latinas/os in particular ways, many of which competed and conflicted with one another.

Papi's New Direction – Linda Mendoza Takes the Helm

Chasing Papi's director, Linda Mendoza, wielded significant influence over the production of the film, once she came on board in 2001. In addition to the obvious contributions she made to the film by directing the actors, it was also Mendoza's idea to set the playful, upbeat tone by creating animated sequences for the film, for example. In addition, she was very involved with the casting and musical score.[59] Antonio Mejias's article, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*/The Woman Behind *Papi*,"[60] highlights Mendoza's status as the first Latina to direct a studio picture, and the author refers to her as the talent "behind" the film. As I will show, however, there were many things about the film that were beyond her control and her vision of the film did not conform as closely to the studio's vision as might have originally been anticipated. This fact becomes particularly evident when considering the way in which the studio chose to market the film (one of the many things over which Mendoza had no control).

Overall, Mendoza had a very clear vision of the movie she wanted to make. As a first time

[59] "Special Features: Todo 'Everything' Papi."

[60] Antonio Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*," *La Opinión* vol 77, iss. 213, April 16, 2003, 1D.

feature director, however, she admits she was a bit "naïve to the film business, to how things were done. I had absolutely no idea what, how to handle all of the above the line, so to speak, the executives." She further explains that her greatest learning curve had nothing to do with the actual making of the film - dealing with the actors, storyboarding the film, or other such details - which she likens to shooting a television pilot. Rather, the most difficult part of adjusting to film, as opposed to television, was "in understanding what they wanted from me, what I thought I was doing."[61]

With regard to the people with whom she worked during the production process, Mendoza indicates she worked most closely with writers Sarnoff and Balian; executive producer Tajamika Paxton, who was there to "oversee everything for Forest [Whitaker]"; and co-producer Nellie Nugiel, who assisted her in dealing with the director of photography, production designers, and line producer, for example. She also acknowledges a production assistant named Allison, who was important in assisting with getting the film into production. Producer Forest Whitaker, she says, was present for the majority of the film shoots and she felt that overall, he was supportive of her entire process, from casting to production design. She appreciated the ways in which he challenged her to constantly think about how she could do things differently than what had already been discussed, while also supporting her vision. She says, "He believed in being the filmmaker. He believed that you have a vision, you should try to do that." By the same token, she admits, "He also was working for [the studio], though. He had to, you know, worry about the budget and stuff."[62]

[61] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[62] Ibid.

With regard to her understanding of Whitaker's support, Mendoza has said, "*Pienso que él verdaderamente sintió que era importante que yo tuviera una fuerte conexión con la comedia*/I think he truly felt it was important that I had a strong connection to comedy."[63] In addition, Mendoza says it was the specificity of her television experience that enabled her to manage *Chasing Papi*'s stressful production schedule. The film was made on a small budget and under very tight time constraints – 28 days, to be exact,[64] which Mendoza believes would have been difficult for anyone without her television experience to do.[65]

Although she has extensive experience in comedy, Mendoza's experience with specifically Latino-themed programming is, in fact, "scarce."[66] Emphasizing that when she works on any project, "it's not about telling a black story, or telling a white story. And I have to say… it really bugs me when people try to always make it about that,"[67] she maintains that her primary concern is the written word, and how she can improve the comedy of the work. As she saw it, *Chasing Papi* was "a comedy first… and Latin second."[68] However, many critics criticized Mendoza's directing as well as the stereotypical depiction of Latinas/os in the film.

Far fewer critics praised Mendoza for what she accomplished with her foray into the world of feature filmmaking. As a first time feature director, for example, Mendoza notes (and I agree) that she was successful in keeping the tone of the film consistent, which is often difficult

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[63] Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*."

[64] "Special Features: Todo 'Everything' Papi."

[65] Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*."

[66] Eva Sanchis, "'Chasing Papi,' la prueba de fuego," *El Diario la Prensa* (New York) vol. XXXVIII, iss. 1317501, April 11, 2003, 36. Mendoza has, for example, directed one episode of "The Brothers Garcia" in 2000, as well as one episode of *Ugly Betty* (2008), "Betty's Baby Bump," (aired May 8, 2008), for which she won an American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) Award.

[67] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[68] Daniel Chang, "'Papi Chulo' Will Venture into Uncharted Territory."

for many first time directors to maintain. She is also proud of having kept the film as "innocent" as she was able, despite numerous suggestions to increase its sexual content. As Simón indicates about Mendoza's role in the making of the film, "She had a tough job."[69] In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that Mendoza inherited a heavily revised script with a complicated past and she faced many obstacles in directing a Latina-themed comedy, all of which must be considered when evaluating her contributions to the film.

A Comedy About the Hispanic Experience? Says Who?

Mendoza says that by the time she received the script in 2001, there was no focus on the cultural differences between the three Latinas in the film, which had been the central premise around which the original story had been conceptualized. Simón had been relieved of her duties as both a writer and producer by the time Mendoza was attached to the project and, in fact, the two filmmakers never met. Mendoza says the script "was just about three different women, from three different social stratospheres."[70] As someone who bonded with others on the basis of their working-class status, not race or ethnicity, it follows that her interest and connection to the film would be based not around culture, but around the issues of class.

Mendoza says she always makes sure she is able to relate to her characters. It is so crucial to her creative process, in fact, that she declined the opportunity to direct HBO's *Real Women Have Curves*, not long before she became involved with *Chasing Papi*. With regard to the East Los Angeles experience that was depicted in *Real Women Have Curves*, she says, "I couldn't relate to it at all. And I knew there was nothing I could bring to the table with that script, because

[69] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[70] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

I was adamantly opposed to half the dialogue in it." In particular, she objected to what she perceived as Ana's mother treating her daughter so poorly. In addition, she says, for example, she never had an altar in her home, and she felt a disconnect with many of the cultural details in the script, which made her feel she was simply not a good match for the project.[71]

Simón recalls feeling Mendoza was actually an inappropriate choice for *Chasing Papi*, which perhaps she may have been, if the film had been true to the script that Simón had penned.[72] However, considering that the studio no longer had an interest in telling the story as Simón envisioned it, Mendoza's sensibility did, in many ways, fit much better with the new direction the studio was taking: towards a more universal appeal and away from catering specifically to the tastes of the Latina/o audience.

Mendoza says that in her discussions with the studio, there was never any emphasis on the fact that this was a film intended to reflect the Hispanic experience. She says she was very clear: "I always said I want to make a movie about three women and one guy who happen to be Latin."[73] In 2002, however, Fox executive, Tom Rothman described the film as being, "targeted to what is the fastest growing moviegoing demographic nationwide. Giving them a big, glossy Hollywood movie that reflects their lives, culture and humor is a big opportunity for us."[74] To reiterate Mendoza's perspective, however, she emphasizes, "It wasn't about the Hispanic experience. I'm sorry. That's my point… It wasn't addressing the Hispanic experience. I didn't want to address the Hispanic experience."[75] While the studio's hire of Mendoza for a film that

[71] Ibid.

[72] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[73] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[74] Michael Leming, "Fox Tries a Latin Beat," *Daily Variety*, June 5, 2002, 7.

[75] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

was intended to have a broad appeal to a variety of audience seems sensible, if they wanted to maintain an emphasis on the "Hispanic experience," as Rothman indicates, Mendoza was not aware of it, nor would she necessarily have been the best match for the project. If the studio, on the other hand, was of the same mind as Mendoza, their marketing efforts indicate otherwise (as will subsequently be detailed). Mendoza aimed to make a film that "happened" to be populated by Latina/o characters, and the studio had, in fact, made conscious efforts to remove much of the cultural specificity in the script. By maintaining that the film was "for" a Hispanic audience, the studio was effectively attempting to do what Simón says is to "serve people ketchup in a salsa bottle."[76] Whether or not the studio was of the opinion that the film was truly still "for" Latina/o audiences, there was a lack of communication and/or agreement between Fox and Mendoza, with regard to the overall vision of the film.

Resisting and Reproducing Stereotypes

In addition to the difficulty of finding common ground with regard to the target audience and overall vision of the film, there were even more fundamental challenges with regard to how to represent Latinas in the film, having to do with they ways in which some non-Latinos working on the project imagined the Latina/o community. Carla Hacken, for example, is reported to have said that during the making of the film that one thing she "learned more than anything about why this is culturally appealing is that the idea of the cheating man is really, really relateable to [Latinos], and really funny to them."[77] Simón recalls being very uncomfortable with the way one writer viewed the community. She explains that when she emphasized that while the film should

[76] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[77] Sharon Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 2003.

be sexy, it should also be kept PG-13 because Latinos are relatively conservative and very often attend movies as a family, the writer responded angrily, protesting that Latinos are not sexually conservative, for "they (Latinos) walk around pregnant all the time."[78] Mendoza remembers encountering Fox executives who betrayed similarly stereotypical beliefs when she removed much of the infighting among the women (it should be noted that there is still plenty left in the film). Having minimized the amount of fighting, Mendoza says executives charged that she had "watered [the script] down," one executive going so far as to say to her, "We all know how Latin women are about their men. You know, they need to fight more."[79]

Mendoza says that she also had to struggle to minimize the objectification of the women on-screen. In particular, she remembers a struggle over one of the scenes in which the three women surround Tomás, who is passed out on a bed. She remembers one individual involved in the production suggesting it would be an ideal moment for the women to "*mostraran algo de piel*/show some skin."[80] Mendoza had to remind him that considering the women had just met each other and discovered they were dating the same man, it would be unlikely for them to take the opportunity to become so familiar with one another. In the final film, the scene plays out with the women fully clothed, as Mendoza refused to contribute to women being exploited any more than they already are.

With regard to the stereotyping she encountered during the making of the film, Mendoza notes, "If the mentality is starting there, you're fighting an uphill battle."[81] Resisting

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[78] Laura Simon, memorandum to Carla Hacken, "Re: Papi Chulo," July 29, 1999, Laura Angélica Simón, personal papers.

[79] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[80] Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*."

[81] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

stereotypical attitudes, such as the perceived hypersexuality of Latinas/os, held by people in positions of power must be recognized as a fundamental and exhausting challenge for the Latina filmmakers, in this case. Mendoza felt her Latina identity made her particularly well-suited to her job as the director of *Chasing Papi* because of her sensitivity to exploitative representations, such as those mentioned above. She explains about stereotypes:

> *Yo no permitiría que sucedieran, como a lo mejor lo haría alguien que no fuese latino, o que no fuese una mujer. Ellos permitirían los estereotipos porque esa es la percepción que tienen de lo que es cómico.*/[I wouldn't let them happen, like someone who is not a Latino or is not a woman probably would. They allow stereotypes because that's what they perceive as funny.[82]

While *Chasing Papi* has been criticized for its stereotyping of Latinas/os, it would have likely been filled with even more questionable material had it been directed by a non-Latina/o. However, while having individuals whose identity has sensitized them to stereotypes in positions where they have the power to make decisions regarding the representations of Latinas/os does provide opportunities to mediate "negative" depictions of the community, it is important to recognize that ethnic and gender identity alone do not guarantee their absence. What one Latina/o finds objectionable about a character may be perfectly acceptable to another. With varying levels of language proficiency, education, economic mobility, assimilation, and differences in culture/national origin, Latinas/os' priorities and struggles are not necessarily the same.

Representations of Race, Class, and Gender in *Chasing Papi*

With regard to the representations of Latinas/os in *Chasing Papi*, the film does resist

[82] Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*."

certain stereotypes while reinforcing others. In fact, it communicates conflicting messages regarding Latina agency, sexuality, and class, which reflects varying priorities and experiences of both the Latinas involved in the production of the film and the studios' and writers' understandings (and lack thereof) of "the" Latina experience in the United States.

For example, the Latina protagonists represent a range of economic status, two of the three characters occupying levels above the working class status that is so often depicted by characters of Latin American descent. Lorena is an educated woman with a successful law career and Patricia comes from a very wealthy family that has provided her with the good breeding intended to secure her an equally wealthy and well-bred mate. Cici, the working-class waitress, is the most stereotypical character of the three. Each woman goes through a process of self-discovery, which involves a transformation over the course of the film. However, that transformation results in the characters either conforming more closely to established stereotypes than their characters did at the beginning of the film, or it confirms that their characters cannot escape them.

Lorena's self-discovery, for example, revolves around embracing her sexuality. At the beginning of the film, she is shown to be a very driven woman who is committed to her community. Her connection with Tomás is shown to be an intellectual one from the moment of their first scene together, as they read romantic poetry to one another. Later in the film, when Lorena is mistaken for Miss Puerto Rico and impersonates the missing contestant during the "Miss Latina America" contest, she explains that a woman can be both beautiful and smart, suggesting new entrance exams should be instituted for future contestants. By the end of the film, Lorena no longer wears her hair in a bun, but rather, lets her locks flow freely. Her long, straight skirt is replaced by a miniskirt, which is revealed as she kicks her feet up onto her desk, emphasizing her power as an educated, professional woman, as well as her long legs and newly

found sex appeal. While the idea that a woman can be both smart and sexy is, in many ways, contrary to stereotypes of beautiful women being unintelligent, in this case, the film supports the idea that Lorena embrace her beauty and sexuality in ways that conform to normative beauty standards. It is acceptable for a woman to be intelligent, so long as she remains concerned with appearance and sex appeal.

Patricia's transformation is also tied to her physical appearance, as well as her economic mobility. The transformation begins when she loses one of her blue contacts in a crowd, towards the end of the film. Having repeatedly been teased (particularly by Cici) about being ashamed of her Latina heritage throughout the film, Patricia predictably starts to panic when her naturally brown eye is left naked and mismatched with her fake, blue eye. She soon realizes, however, that rather than replace the blue contact, she has the option of removing the other one. Once she takes the remaining contact off to reveal her two naturally brown eyes, Lorena says, in Spanish, "*que bonita*/[how pretty]." Patricia learns to embrace her more "authentic" and natural beauty and also leaves the comfort of her parents' home to get a job in a museum. At the end of the film, she is shown in a small apartment, dressed casually in jeans and a ponytail, without her blue contacts. Patricia is embracing her Latinidad but she has also taken a step down in class. Simón remembers that she initially planned for Patricia to remain wealthy and end up in a romantic relationship with a *Fidelista*, a communist from Cuba, who, despite his political leanings, finds he enjoys Patricia and her money. Simón wanted to "deal with the whole Cuban obsession with Fidel [Castro]."[83] Had it been included in the film, it would have been one of the "inside jokes" that Latinos would "get," but not necessarily be understood by non-Latinos who are unfamiliar with the culture and politics of the community. Not only was the joke removed, but the new

[83] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

ending denies Patricia status as an upper class Latina.

Cici's character transforms the least. She begins the film as a loud, emotional, and sexy bombshell. The first scene in which Cici appears emphasizes her good looks and dancing ability. She is someone who is very aware of her sexuality and she uses it to her advantage. She also recognizes that people have low expectations of her because of her physical appearance. She says at one point in the film, "I may not look smart, but I'm full of surprises." Being "full of surprises" could be interpreted as having sexual connotations. It could also, however, be interpreted as indicating that Cici has "street smarts." Street smarts, however, are not necessarily indicative of intelligence. Cici is never shown to be particularly bright and although it was considered during development that Cici decide to go back to college, in the end, that option was not developed.[84] Rather, Cici's transformation has to do with her realizing her dream of being a dancer. Self-taught, Cici dreams of being taken seriously, as a professional. At the end of the film, she lands a job performing on a cruise ship and is shown to be enjoying life and delighting in the company of sailors while dressed in a swimsuit. Although she is shown to have achieved a respectable dancing job of sorts (rather than "the kind with a pole" as Patricia jokes, early on in the film), her success is still tied to her looks and her natural ability to dance. She continues to be objectified and portrayed as a hypersexual Latina, a variation of the longstanding stereotype of the cantina girl who Gary Keller describes as "a naughty lady of easy virtue, who is also outgoing and exhibitionist."[85]

Actors Eva Mendes and Eduardo Verástegui have commented on what they perceived as

[84] Laura Simon, memorandum to Elizabeth Gabler, Carla Hacken, and Tracy Silbert, "Notes on Parriott/McGibbon Outline," March 16, 2000, Laura Angélica Simón, personal papers.

[85] Gary D. Keller. "The First Decades: Types of Characters." In *Hispanics and United States Film: An Overview and Handbook*. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 1994, 40.

negative stereotypes of Latinos that appear in the film. Mendes recalls that when she was given the option of choosing any role in the film that she wanted, she turned the opportunity down because she "found the script offensive – not to mention bad." She explained to *Hispanic* magazine that at the time, she felt, "I can't do this because I'm putting my people back several steps if I do this. I'm not obsessed with the politics of being Hispanic or any of that, but I know when something just feels like it's an exploitation."[86] After making the film, Verástegui, who played the stereotypical Latin lover, Tomás, said that he "made a promise that I would never use my talents ever again to offend my family or my country."[87]

In a (rare) critical analysis of the film that focuses on the use of the mythic figure of *la llorona* in the film, Shane Moreman and Bernadette Calafell note that Tomás's career and financial success, and his acquisition of the "American dream" (which again, depart from stereotypes of Latinos in film) are somewhat impaired in a scene in which his "natural" propensity as a Latin lover gets him into trouble with his three girlfriends and subsequently impedes his performance at work. The authors show that Latina agency is achieved at the expense of Tomás's character, as he is emasculated and rejected throughout the film, creating a divide between Latinas and Latinos, who are shown to be incompatible. As the three Latinas reject Tomás and make their journeys to become more "authentic" Latinas by the film's end, Tomás is distanced from them, while his attention shifts to the FBI agent, Carmen, who has been following the characters throughout the movie. As a federal agent, Carmen's place is signaled "within normative U.S. citizenship." Like the other three women, Carmen also emasculates Tomás, whose agency is tightly bound to his masculinity. In order to be a "good Latino,"

[86] Lydia Martin, "Eva," *Hispanic*, November 2003, 38-40.

[87] Wayne Melton, "'Bella' Fortuna: Eduard Verástegui gets ugly to jump-start his career," *Back Stage East*, November 22-28, 2007, 22.

however, with access to the American Dream, it is Carmen who the film suggests may be his "true" match, rather than the newly authentic Latinas. Overall, the authors find the film to communicate a "damaging message that is disguised as a light and harmless comedy."[88]

Whether interpreted as damaging or empowering, or perhaps more appropriately, both, the film does continue to find new audiences and be interpreted in multiple ways. Mendoza notes that a friend recently called to congratulate her on the film as the friend's sister had remarked that she and her daughter had just watched an "adorable" movie, *Chasing Papi*, on HBO. Young girls (and women, alike) may interpret the end of the film as empowering as the women do find their own self-worth to be more valuable than Tomás's attention. The women value themselves enough to reject his philandering ways and instead follow their own dreams and find their own happiness.

While some critics have acknowledged the film's message of female empowerment, many others highlight the superficial nature of that message, condescendingly referring to it as an appeal to "grrrl power,"[89] and likening it to a version of the Powerpuff Girls.[90] Even more have criticized the film for its overall, stereotypical depiction of Latinas and Latinos.[91] Although the women do befriend one another by the end of the film, it is only after they argue and hurl insults at one another, calling each other "maids," and "bookworms," for the majority of the film. As one journalist notes, the end of the film "would make a happy turn of events if Mendoza and her

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[88] Dr. Shane T. Moreman and Bernadette Marie Calafell, "Buscando para nuestra latinidad: Utilizing La Llorona for Cultural Critique," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* vol. 1, no. 4 (November 2008): 315.

[89] Rita Kempley, "Don't Waste Much Time 'Chasing Papi,'" *Washington Post*, April 16, 2003, C16.

[90] Carrie Rickey, "Chasing a man, finding yourself," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Features Magazine, April 16, 2003, D04.

[91] See, for example: Rita Kempley, "Don't Waste Much Time 'Chasing Papi."; John Patterson, "Queer as Folk: Spinal Tap's crew have a new target, finds John Patterson in his look at US movies," *The Guardian* (London), April 22, 2003, 11.; Mike Clark, "Dull 'Chasing Papi' Goes Nowhere Fast," *USA Today*, April 16, 2003, 3D.

flock of writers hadn't ridiculed the characters and objectified the leading ladies for all but the last 10 minutes of this movie."[92] While Latinas are shown to have the potential to be intelligent and self-sufficient, they are also shown to be more "authentically" Latina when embracing their innate sexuality and also remaining in their appropriate class.[93]

Critic Rita Kempley was very quick to judge Mendoza, who she said, "demonstrates a clear grasp of stereotype,"[94] as if she alone shoulders the blame for their creation. What Kempley fails to recognize is the "uphill battle" Mendoza faced with regard to the stereotypical beliefs many executives and fellow filmmakers attempted to impose upon the production, as well as the complexity of how those stereotypes were put into place. Fox did employ and consult Mendoza and several other Latinas throughout the filmmaking process, but their suggestions were not always taken into consideration. Furthermore, they had quite divergent backgrounds and investments in the project and were not encouraged to collaborate on the project, so it should not be surprising that there was a lack of clarity over how to best represent the characters on-screen.

In response to the criticism that the film has received, Mendoza feels incredible frustration over the fact that *Chasing Papi* has been scrutinized so heavily. The film, she indicates, was simply intended as a fun hour and a half. Instead, she says, "Everybody wants it to be something else, something more important."[95] However, when taking into consideration the studio's direct appeal to Latina/o America, it is only natural to question the images and the manner in which they were created in order to appeal to the community. Moreman and Calafell

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[92] Kempley, "Don't Waste Much Time 'Chasing Papi.'"

[93] See Moreman and Calafell, "Bucando para nuestra latinidad," which conducts an in dept analysis of the use of the mythic figure, *la llorona*, which the authors argue is associated with working-class Latinas in the film.

[94] Kempley, "Don't Waste Much Time 'Chasing Papi.'"

[95] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

make an important point when they explain, "As Hollywood seeks profits by resisting being an all-white industry and by embracing ways to become an industry that appeals to and/or represents other ethnic or racial communities, it is important for scholars to recognize and hold accountable the ways that Latina/o texts are produced."[96] While it is important to "hold accountable" the ways in which the texts are produced, unfortunately, it is rare that the conditions under which they are produced are actually investigated in any depth. Moreman and Calafell themselves, for example, focus on textual analysis, but do not investigate "the ways" that the representations came about. Media scholars too often fail to investigate the methods employed to create the images we critique. We, along with critics and audiences, are too eager to attribute credit/blame to individuals assumed to have creative control, rather than explore the unique circumstances that give rise to the images for which we are so eager to hold someone "accountable."

As Stuart Hall notes, marginalized populations are regularly incorporated into popular culture in ambiguous ways. Rather than focus on the negative effects of, say, the commodification of "authentic" cultures, he encourages readers to engage in the process of the struggle over meaning, for culture is an ongoing process that has never been nor ever will be pure. Rather, it is the focus on understanding the power relations and the structures that shape our culture(s), in order to find ways to resist subordination that is imperative.[97] Rather than condemn the filmmakers for the "negative" portrayal of Latinas/os in the film, the case of *Chasing Papi* provides an excellent opportunity to examine exactly the kind of power relations and structures of which Hall speaks.

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[96] Moreman and Calafell, "Buscando para nuestra latinidad," 322.

[97] Stuart Hall, "What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace*, ed. Grant Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 21-22.

For although there were several Latinas involved in key creative positions during the development and production of the film, the power they had to make decisions was constantly shifting, and many important creative decisions were made by non-Latinas/os, unfamiliar with the specifics of the culture. The representation of Latina/os must be understood as resulting from complicated negotiations between the filmmakers (Latina and otherwise) and representatives of the studio who hoped to profit from the commodification of the Latina/o culture with which they were so unfamiliar.

Filmmakers' Priorities and Sensitivities to Stereotypes

Although Simón admits that the very premise of her story, three women chasing the same man, may have been "politically incorrect," she stresses that she did aim to subvert numerous stereotypes of Latinas/os in her version of the story, which she felt subsequent versions lacked. Although she has never been able to bring herself to watch the final film that was born of her idea, she was required to read numerous versions of the script when involved in WGA arbitration hearings intended to determine which of the many writers ultimately deserved credit for the script. She was extremely disappointed in all of the versions that she read.[98]

Mendoza, however, recalls working closely with Sarnoff and Balian, the final two writers who worked on the screenplay (and who received writing credit, along with Simón and Antin). She says that, in her opinion, they were working their way back towards the original script credited to Simón and Antin. As the director, who worked closely with the writers, Mendoza's understanding of the vision of the film is, of course, influential with regard to the final product. Remnants of Simón's original script and sentiment can still be found in the final film, to be sure.

[98] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

However, reminiscent of a bad game of telephone, the meaning behind those bits and pieces is distorted beyond recognition. If Mendoza and the screenwriters were, in fact, trying to recapture some of the original humor or feeling of Simon's script, so dependent upon exploring the cultural diversity within the Hispanic community, but with the intent of making a film that was not about the Hispanic experience, it is not surprising that what the film communicates about "the experience" is muddled.

Although their interests in representing the Latina/o experience are born out of very different circumstances and their approaches to the film are certainly quite different, it is important to note that Simón and Mendoza did share many similarities that, had they been given the opportunity to negotiate amongst themselves, may have resulted in a film that represents a more cohesive approach to representing "the" Latina experience, rather than an amalgamation of their divergent points of view. Mendoza and Simón, for example, shared a common goal: to tell as story that was not based on the struggles of the Latino community, but rather, a fun and lighthearted film filled with Latino characters. As Mendoza explains, *Chasing Papi* was "a first in that it's not about the struggle, some hard-luck story like *Mi Familia* or *Selena*. I didn't want to patronize our ethnicity. This movie could have been about anybody -- Asians, African Americans. It could be any three girls going after the same guy."[99] Where she and Simón differed was in Simon's emphasis on the cultural specificity of the women's experience.

Both filmmakers were also concerned with stereotypes, although the stereotypes to which they were most sensitive were, in many cases, somewhat different. While Simón was intent on depicting middle-class and wealthy Latinas, for example, it was precisely the contrast between what, by the time Mendoza became involved in the film, had transformed into three distinctly

[99] Sharon Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

working class, middle class, and wealthy characters – Lorena, Patricia, and Cici – that interested her. With such a large and diverse group of individuals (Mendoza and Simon, being the two prominent Latinas) contributing their ideas to the depictions of these Latina/o characters, it would be difficult to maintain all parties involved committed to the same, consistent point of view throughout the duration of the film. Executives' lack of understanding about the culture, however, made it even more difficult for the studio to maintain focus and consistency, as they did not necessarily recognize the issues around which they were losing focus.

Selling Latinas/os on *Papi*

Casting

One issue around which there was a considerable amount of debate was the casting of the film, for which Mendoza was largely responsible. Mendoza explains that with regard to the actors, "*El estudio quería contratar a actores que ellos consideraban tenían mayor reconocimiento general*/[The studio wanted to contract actors they felt would have greater recognition]" than those Mendoza had in mind. Mendoza felt that if a pop star such as Enrique Iglesias or Christina Aguilera were cast, the film would become a star vehicle, not a film for the Latin market. She explains, "*Verdaderamente, pensé que eran dos cosas muy differentes.*/[I really thought those were two very different things.][100]

Although the studio was interested in pop stars who would be recognizable to general audiences and the film was not being made for the Spanish-speaking community, the studio did still hope to attract the Spanish-dominant audience, which, perhaps, explains why they agreed to casting the actors Mendoza chose: well-known personalities among Latin American and

[100] Mejias, "*La mujer detrás de Papi*."

Spanish-speaking audiences. The protagonists of the film included Mexican soap opera star, Eduardo Verástegui; Columbian model and television personality, Sofia Vergara; Puerto Rican actress/dancer, Rosalyn Sanchez; and Jaci Velazquez, a Spanish-language, Christian singer from Houston, Texas. Mendoza notes that the actors that appear in the film were her first choices and that Whitaker stood behind her in her decisions. It was, however, "tough" to get the studio to agree to the cast. For example, Mendoza explains with regard to Vergara, executives did not understand why she was a good choice. Mendoza had to explain, "Well, she's the number one downloaded woman in Latin America. You know, she has like 30 million hits on her website."[101] Although none of the actors were stars among English-speaking communities in the U.S. the way that Iglesias and Aguilera are, they were well known in their home countries (for those who were born outside of the U.S.) and among the Spanish-speaking community, at large. So, although they did not contract the stars they hoped would appeal to the English speaking audience, Fox was able to appeal to the Spanish-language community with celebrities from within the community.

At the time the film was released, *The Washington Post*'s Sharon Waxman reported, "The studio cast well-known actors and media personalities from across Latin America to bridge the cultural differences within the Spanish-speaking community."[102] This indicates that the studio was depending upon the audience to draw upon their extratextual knowledge of the actors, each of which hails from a different country. For as Barry King notes, when considering stars, "the image on screen is already contextualized by the circulation of biographical and personal

[101] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[102] Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

anecdotal materials that frame their appearances on and off-screen."[103] In this case, the biographical details of the stars' national origin become vital to the strategy that Fox was employing to close the cultural gap between Latina/o audiences. At the same time, however, as Fox executive Carla Hacken noted, "In the development process, it was really important that we were saying, 'This could be a Mexican, Cuban, a Puerto Rican story.' We never actually say where they come from…. Hopefully this movie spans the gap between all different… Latinos."[104] Hacken indicates they hoped *not* to call attention to national origin in order to bridge the cultural differences among Latinos. There are, of course, both benefits and disadvantages to having the audience recognize the different actors' countries of origin. Whether the studio ultimately hoped for that recognition, however, is unclear, and their strategy was inconsistent. Mendoza indicates that in many ways, she felt the studio's thinking was that "a Latin cast would draw in a Latin audience. I think that's ultimately what they were hoping."[105] Generally speaking, she says the studio was, simply put, "clueless," a word also used by Simón to describe the executives and their knowledge about Latino culture, around which her story was based.

Content

As the inconsistencies with the casting decisions demonstrate, Fox struggled to create a Latina/o text that maintained a delicate balance between appealing to the Latina/o market (both Spanish- and English-dominant) and remaining palatable to the mainstream. If the studio was, indeed, interested in obtaining a "Latino consultant" to assist with the Latina/o element of the

[103] Barry King, "Articulating Stardom," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York, New York: Routledge, 2006), 240.

[104] Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

[105] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

project, as previously mentioned, Associate Producer Christy Haubegger, could not have been a more appropriate choice. Although she had no experience with filmmaking at the time she became part of the *Chasing Papi* team, her success with *Latina* magazine represents one of few successful attempts to reach young, English-dominant, Latina consumers, and to attract U.S. advertisers to pursue an English-speaking Latina/o market. Haubegger hoped to "build a great media company" that would encompass books, magazines, film, and television,[106] and by the latter part of 2000, she had successfully expanded into books with her first book publication, *Latina Beauty*. *Chasing Papi* was her first foray into feature filmmaking, but as the Associate Producer title suggests, her producing responsibilities were likely limited, as the position is, of all producing titles, the one with the least amount of prestige/responsibility.[107]

Chasing Papi's director, Linda Mendoza, confirms the limits of Haubegger's active involvement in producing the film when she explains that while extremely smart and knowledgeable, her primary responsibilities were concerned with "other ways to raise money for the movie - product placement and stuff like that."[108] As far as Mendoza was concerned, Haubegger had no influence over the content of the film other than the fact that, for example, she had to find a way to use a Chrysler Crossfire in the film because Haubegger had secured a deal with the manufacturer of the popular car. Haubegger's principle value to Fox was related to her

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[106] Jeffery D. Zbar, "Christy Haubegger: Publisher, Latina; Publisher Opens Door to Hispanic Women," *Advertising Age*, February 7, 2000, S6.

[107] According to the PGA, the title of Associate Producer is "granted solely on the decision of the individual receiving the Produced By credit, and is to be granted sparingly and only for those individuals who are delegated significant production functions." Furthermore, "The Associate Producer is responsible for performing one or more producing functions delegated to him/her by the individual receiving the Produced By credit and the Co-Producer. This does not include persons whose primary function is as an assistant." The Assistant Producer then, is more than an assistant, but works under the Producers and Co-producers of the film. See "Code of Credits – Theatrical Motion Pictures: Credit Guidelines," Producers Guild of America, accessed May 1, 2012, http://www.producersguild.org/?coc_tmp_2.

[108] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

ability to convince advertisers to invest in Latina-themed media and the studio utilized her expertise in this risky business venture. It seems curious, however, that Fox would not have attempted to access Haubegger's expertise with regard to how to best reach the consumers being targeted.

Having successfully targeted upwardly mobile Latinas in the United States, through *Latina* magazine, Haubegger's readers possessed the very characteristics of the assimilated, modern, Latina audience Simón described to the studios during her initial discussions of *Chasing Papi*. Haubegger had created *Latina* for readers she imagined were like her, "living between two cultures and two languages."[109] These are the very Latinas whose dollars the studio was aiming to obtain. In order to reach that audience, however, the film would not only need to be marketed appropriately, but the content being marketed to the audience would need to appeal to the community if it hoped to be a financial success.

Haubegger's sentiment about bridging two worlds is something common to many Latinas/os and is echoed by Simón who says, "To come here and to have the point of view that I have from two worlds--to be able to easily go back and forth between languages, between cultures, to have that sort of hybrid. I just love being Mexican. I love being an immigrant. I love being an American."[110] This statement illustrates, however, that the two worlds Latinas bridge can vary from Latina to Latina. Simón emphasizes her experience as an immigrant and bridges the divide between Mexico and America, championing the underdog along the way. As Haubegger has described, developing her own understanding of her identity involved bridging the divide between her Anglo home life and her Mexican-American heritage, which she learned

[109] "Christy Haubegger: My Own Idea."

[110] Michael Quintanilla, "Out of the Mouths of Babes," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1997, 1.

outside of her home. She identified with the "success" stories of Latina/o Americans and has built her career around the rising Hispanic middle class, that segment of the Hispanic population which advertisers are trying to tap, which made her a valuable asset to Fox.

Simón's interest in depicting the three Latinas in *Chasing Papi* as middle class and wealthy was also born out of the desire to see Latinas' varied experiences depicted in the media, rather than additional representations of the more commonly represented working-class. Simón's and Haubegger's interest in the representation of these upwardly mobile women, however, are not one and the same. Their experiences are two examples of "the" Latina experience, neither less "authentic" than the other, and each represents a different set of priorities and perspectives. Rather than as someone with Simón's concern with making a comedy that was "authentically" Latino, or Mendoza's creative priorities with directing a comedy that was reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s and populated with Latino characters, Haubegger came to the project with an interest in the rising Hispanic middle class, and from a much more profit-driven perspective.

As Amy Beer's study, "Periodical Pleasures: Magazines for U.S. Latinas," notes, Haubegger's magazine, *Latina* (along with the magazine *Estylo*), encourages women to challenge gender roles, but women's happiness often lies in their "discovery of their own strength and self-confidence and increased awareness of their own needs and desires."[111] This storyline is very similar, in fact, to that of *Chasing Papi*. Also similar to the world-view present in the film, Beer indicates that the magazines in her study, including *Latina*, "minimize cultural differences between Latinos,"[112] and that they indicate the empowerment of Latinas lies within

[111] Amy Beer, "Periodical Pleasures: Magazines for U.S. Latinas," in *Sex and Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*, edited by Eileen R. Meehan and Ellen Riordan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 175.

[112] Ibid., 171.

the hard-working individuals who have the strength and desire to succeed. Overall, Beer says, ""My analysis indicates that because the magazines define Latinas primarily as consumers, they are a limited forum for women to explore nonconsumerist identities, challenge hegemony, or express oppositional points of view."[113]

The fact that Haubegger's duties remained confined to advertising and marketing efforts, and that Fox failed to engage her with regard to the content of the film may have been a result of Haubegger's own interests or it may have been a lack of interest on the part of the studio. Yet considering the fact that the studio was comfortable crossing artificial boundaries between areas of expertise so often constructed and maintained by industry executives (as described by Avellán, for example, in the previous chapter) and that Haubegger was very interested in expanding into the film industry, it seems curious that Fox would not have utilized her expertise in a wider range of activities. Fox had disregarded the boundaries between film and television, and African-American women's and Latina-themed films, when they hired Mendoza and Whitaker, respectively. In addition, Fox executives, themselves, had little to no knowledge regarding the Latina/o audience that they were trying to tap. Rather than encourage dialogue and collaboration among the filmmakers, who had knowledge about the community in question (although in some cases that knowledge did represent divergent opinions), rather than trust them to negotiate their own personal beliefs and differences as members of a diverse community, the studio attempted to interpret multiple "authorities" opinions, whether they had proven success with Latina/o film (Simón), television comedy (Mendoza), the Hispanic market (Haubegger), women of color films (Whitaker), or a variety of other expertise, which the film's crew possessed. Instead of securing the success of the film, however, the wide range of expertise and

[113] Ibid., 165.

the varying degrees of investment and involvement in the project resulted in a film that was lighthearted and fun and had the potential to be fresh and innovative, yet reinforced many stereotypes and provided a somewhat confused representation of Latinas in the U.S.

Spanish or English, Hispanic or Universal? Picking a Strategy and (not) Sticking to it!

Where the Hispanic advertising industry had been built by targeting the Hispanic market through Spanish-language media, the release of *Chasing Papi*, marketed as "the first" studio attempt to reach the Hispanic market signals a desire of the industry to shift their approach to the increasingly diverse Latina/o audience. Haubegger, aware of the interest in English-speaking Hispanic audiences,[114] explained at the time *Chasing Papi* was made, "A movie in English, by and about and for Hispanics, is a great opportunity for marketers like Maybelline or Chrysler,"[115] whose products were placed prominently in the film. Haubegger's comment about the opportunity represented by a film "by and about and for Hispanics" recalls the first wave of Chicano filmmakers who made films "by, for, and about Chicanos," during the Chicano movement. Yet *Chasing Papi* is in no way the kind of oppositional cinema that was born out of the Chicano movement. In fact, it is a comedy located squarely within the commercial system, which is reflected by Haubegger's statement about the interest in the marketing opportunity an English speaking film such as *Chasing Papi* represents. Although the story was initially intended to explore the cultural diversity of Latinas in the U.S. while appealing primarily to English-dominant Hispanics, ultimately, the film appealed to the notion of pan-ethnic Latino identity and

[114] Laurel Wentz, "Cultural Cross over; A growing number of savvy marketers reach out in English as well as Spanish," *Advertising Age*, July 7, 2003, S1.

[115] Wentz, "New Gig: Haubegger."

was manipulated to appeal to as wide a variety of audiences as possible (including Spanish-dominant Latinas/os and non-Latinos) in order to maximize profits.

Making efforts to reach the English-dominant segment of the Hispanic population is a particularly risky endeavor because as Haubegger states, "there is no broadcast way to aggregate English-speaking Hispanics."[116] Instead of experimenting with unproven ways of reaching the audience, however, the studio relied heavily on the only methods proven to reach the Hispanic audience, that being Spanish-language media. In an attempt to reach the Spanish-speaking segment of the audience, the film was heavily publicized on Spanish-language radio stations and in cities such as New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Diego, where Latino populations are highly concentrated. However, considering that the film was not made for this audience, the studio's heavy investment in marketing among this population seems misguided. Sharon Waxman discussed Mendoza's concern over Fox's marketing strategy when she explained, "While the studio is marketing the film exclusively to Hispanics, director Mendoza wishes Fox had been willing to publicize it outside its target audience. 'I think we're missing a huge market, the American teen market,' she says. 'Why not open it up to other cultures?'"[117] Mendoza says she offered her insight into the audiences with which she was familiar, the audience she believed was the target for the film:

> I tried to explain to them, those people that are watching Univision aren't going out to see *Chasing Papi*. They're waiting for it to come home on the TV. They're not going out to spend money… We need the audience that's watching George Lopez, we need the audience that's watching *Greetings from Tucson*, that's watching *Mad TV*.[118]

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

[118] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

The marketing team, however, was not responsive to Mendoza's suggestions and as she explains it, she was "kept out of the loop," with regard to the marketing. Whitaker, she explains, dealt with that aspect of the project.

As Whitaker explains it, when Fox approached him with the film, part of the appeal was that it was such a "universal film" that utilized strong "archetypes."[119] In fact, the word "universal" was used by a number of the actors to describe *Chasing Papi*, in promotional materials as well as interviews. While on the one hand, Fox claimed the project targeted a young Latina audience, Gabler also noted, "We really focused a lot on our script in trying to make it accessible to as many people as we could… You always have the hope that it crosses over to the American mainstream audience, not just the American Latino audience."[120]

While Simón had initially conceptualized the film as a broad comedy with crossover appeal, she was clear about her vision: "I wasn't trying to make a movie for everybody. I wasn't worried about non-Latino audiences. Because I'm still of the belief that if you do something authentically right they'll come."[121] As she and Trench noted in a memo to Ziskin, Hacken, and Silbert, early in the film's development, the comedy was intended to be accessible to a broad audience, while being made specifically for the Latino audience. They noted, "There is a huge discrepancy in language ability among Latinos and a film like this, with big jokes and rich with music, is easy for everyone to understand." Furthermore, they explain, "Nothing this commercial has ever been made for the this [sic] audience."[122]

As the film got further into development, and the non-Latino audience became of greater

[119] "Special Features: Todo 'Everything' Papi."

[120] Chang, "'Papi Chulo' Will Venture into Uncharted Territory."

[121] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

[122] Tracy Trench and Laura Simon, memorandum to Laura Ziskin, Carla Hacken, and Tracy Silbert, "Papi Chulo – First Draft."

and greater concern, the studio more actively appealed to the "universal audience," at the expense of appealing to a specifically U.S. Latina/o market. As Lael Loewenstein noted in a *Daily Variety* review of the film, *Chasing Papi*'s "hybrid title smacks of savvy cross-cultural marketing…."[123] The original title, *Papi Chulo*, in fact, was changed to the title to which Loewenstein refers (*Chasing Papi*) for two reasons: 1) to avoid confusing Anglo audiences who might think the film was in Spanish, and 2) to avoid any misconception that the film might be portraying Papi/Tomás as an opportunistic womanizer.[124]

"*Papi chulo*," however, is a common phrase that would have been recognizable to most Latina/o audiences, both English- and Spanish-speaking, as a term referring to a good-looking man, not necessarily a womanizer. In fact, Haubegger's *Latina* magazine has paid a considerable amount of attention to *papis chulos* in both articles and segments of the magazine devoted to them. The October 1997 issue, devoted to men, included an article entitled, "*Los Papis Chulos*/Our Finest Men," which focused on 10 Latino celebrities/role models, identifying them by country of origin. Haubegger made a conscious decision to include articles and *papi chulo* pages and profiles in order to combat the negative stereotypes of Latino males as criminals. As Katynka Zazueta Martinez has noted, "*Latina* has responded to such media coverage by describing their *papis chulos* as respectful sons, devoted husbands, or caring brothers," while also celebrating the male body for female readers' pleasure.[125]

Although not made specifically for a non-Latino audience, the studios' title change does indicate that the studio was catering to non-Latinos, at the expense of cultural specificity that

[123] Loewenstein, "Chasing Papi."

[124] Antonio Mejias-Rentas, "No le digan Papi Chulo." *La Opinión* vol. 77, iss. 211, April 14, 2003, 1D.

[125] Katynka Zazueta Martínez, "Latina Magazine and the Invocation of a Panethnic Family: Latino Identity as It Is Informed by Celebrities and Papis Chulos." *The Communication Review*, 7:2 (April 1, 2004): 166.

might appeal to the Latina/o audience that was originally the studio's target. In their other efforts to also avoid alienating particular segments of the Latina/o community, other inconsistencies in terms of the demographic that the studio was, in fact, targeting become evident. For example, as previously noted, Fox executive Carla Hacken explained the studio avoided identifying the characters' countries of origin in hope of unifying the gap between different Latino groups.[126] What the studio did not take into account, however, are the ways in which Latinos choose to self-identify or how they would like to be identified.

A Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos found that Latinos tend to identify themselves according to specific countries of origin (whether it be their own, their parents', or their more distant ancestors), although "Latino" and "Hispanic" are also used frequently. The report explains:

> Furthermore, this tie to home country is much more salient than any pan-ethnic or "Latino/Hispanic" identity. Hispanics are not very likely to identify themselves first and foremost as "Latinos" or "Hispanics." Moreover, they indicate very clearly that they believe Latinos of different countries of origin have separate and distinct cultures rather than one unified Hispanic/Latino culture.[127]

The numbers show that Latinos who have been in the U.S. longer, are English-dominant, and/or whose families have been in the United States for more generation than others are more likely to identify as Latino and/or American, rather than by country of origin. While those numbers are growing, they are still in the minority, and out of Latinos who do identify by country of origin as well as the label "Latina/o" and "American," of the three terms, over half of the respondents

[126] Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

[127] The Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, "2002 National Survey of Latinos: Summary of Findings," December 2002, 25.

prefer to be identified by country of origin.[128]

If the studio was, in fact, targeting the growing (but still smaller) segment of the Latino population that has been in the U.S. for increasing numbers of generations, and that population is assumed to be more assimilated and likely to prefer to be addressed as "American" or "Latino," without any reference to their ancestors' countries of origin, it is also likely that those individuals would be English-dominant and speak without accents. Of the four protagonists in the film, however, only one of the characters, Patricia, lacks an accent. The Latinas/os in the film predominantly speak accented English, which is a result of the majority of these Latina/o actors' first language being Spanish. Commenting on the lead actors' thick accents, Hacken noted, "As long as they slow down when they talk and as long as people understand what they're saying, I don't care if they sound adorably accented at all."[129] Considered "adorable" and conforming to stereotypes of Latinos in the U.S., it was not a concern whether or not the presence of such heavy accents conformed to what might be expected of the characters being presented in the film. Heavy accents indicate closer ties to a Spanish-speaking country of origin, which is not necessarily the characters being portrayed, nor the audience being targeted by the studio.

Mendoza notes that studio executives often expect and, in fact, accentuate Spanish language accents of Latino actors speaking in English. She uses the example of the recent film, *From Prada to Nada* (Angel Garcia, 2011), to make her point. In considering why the characters' accents are accentuated to such a degree in the film, she asks the rhetorical questions "because that's what [studio executives] think they should sound like in order to be real?" She says, "You don't talk like that, I don't talk like that…" Three of the four protagonists in *Chasing*

[128] Arturo Vega, Ph.D., "'Americanizing?' Attitudes and Perceptions of U.S. Latinos," *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy* vol. 18 (2005-2006): 45.

[129] Chang, "'Papi Chulo' Will Venture into Uncharted Territory."

Papi also have heavy accents, however (American-born, Jaci Velazquez being the only actress who does not have an accent), and as previously noted, they were Mendoza's first choices for the roles.

The other reasons Mendoza had for choosing the actors must have been more pressing than her concern with heavily accented characters. Mendoza says, however, that she felt very strongly that the film should have been written in both English and Spanish (much more so than the final film, which contains a smattering of Spanish words inserted throughout). In particular, she feels that it would have "played much better" for Eduardo Verástegui, who spoke very little English when the film was made. Verástegui's acting was, in fact, criticized heavily, which might have been avoided had he been more comfortable speaking the language. The studio, however, was not interested in a bilingual film (for which Simón had also advocated, strongly).

Glossing Over National Origin

The questions of language, assimilation, and national origin is of particular concern in this case, both because the marketing of the film appealed to a pan-ethnic Latino community, and also because the film very briefly points to the issue. As has been emphasized throughout this study, distinguishing between the characters' national origins was something with which Simón was concerned when she conceptualized the film. Although it is not clear how many generations her characters had been in the United States, she had intended them to display distinct characteristics as women of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican decent, each having secured varying levels of economic mobility. As a Mexican immigrant who has assimilated into American culture and also has no accent, Simón has an understanding of many nuances in Latina/o culture and the wide range of combinations of experiences Latinas/os can have in this

country. She references the issue of non-Latinas/os overlooking the diversity of the Latina/o experience, not only in her original scripts for *Chasing Papi*, but also in the films she made before and directly after it.

In Simón's first documentary, *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, Carmen Argote, a local parent who runs the Hoover Street Parents' Center, discusses the disconnect between parents and their children's teachers, which stems from teachers' failure to understand the culture to which the parents and students belong. Argote expresses her irritation over the fact that specifically, "They don't make the distinction between Mexicans, Central Americans, and South Americans." In VH1's comedy *30 Days Until I'm Famous* (2004)[130], Simón takes a more lighthearted, but also more in-depth look at the issue of pan-ethnic Latinidad. She says making *Chasing Papi* had such a profound affect on her, she wrote the script for the film as a response to that experience. In fact, she says, several of the characters in *30 Days Until I'm Famous* were inspired by actual executives at Fox.

The story follows a music executive as he manufactures a Latina pop star, transforming a young Latina, Maggie, into a sexy Latin performer, "Solita," in thirty days. The character Lupie Horowitz, known as "the top Latino makeover coach in the country," or as she prefers to be known, a "cultural identity facilitator," is charged with the task of transforming Maggie from a "vanilla" Latina into a Latina with "a little mystique, with a little spice." As Maggie protests the attack on her authenticity by detailing her family history (her mother is from Mexico, her father from Argentina), Lupie says, "Oh, I don't buy that." She claims Maggie's image is one that communicates she is from middle America, someone comfortable with shopping malls and cheeseburgers. She assures Maggie she will help her to "find that inner Latina. I am gonna bring

[130] *30 Days Until I'm Famous*, directed by Gabriela Tagliavini (New York: VH1 Television, 2004).

her out and make her shake her cha-chas." The film is critical of the idea that Maggie must be "taught" how to be an "authentic" Latina in order to be both recognizable and marketable to an American audience, often to the chagrin of Latina/o audiences and even the performers, themselves. Simón indicates she sees the character and her experiences as a metaphor for her own in the making of *Chasing Papi*, in which she felt she became a "cartoon" of sorts.

More specific to the concept of national origin, in another scene, Maggie's landlord threatens to evict her and her family, explaining, "Business, is business, here or in Guatemala." Maggie says, indignantly, "We are not from Guatemala!," to which the landlord responds, "Whatever." His dismissal of her correction signals the lack of importance both the landlord and white Americans give to the distinction between Latinas/os' national origins, even when faced with Latinas/os who voice their desire to be recognized as distinct from one another.

Although *Chasing Papi* executives had been conscious about not identifying any of the characters' countries of origin in their effort to reach as many Latinos as possible, one trace of Simón's concern with national origins does find its way to the screen in a brief moment of the film: Lorena, the uptight lawyer of the trio, is mistaken for Miss Puerto Rico when she trips and falls to the ground, her hair falling from the tight bun and cascading around her shoulders. As this "bookworm" is revealed to be a sexy Latina, quite despite herself, Lorena finds herself enjoying the attention, having never received such attention for her beauty before. She impersonates Miss Puerto Rico in order to obtain a room where she and the other women can hide Tomás, who is still unconscious. Later that evening, while the women wait for Tomás to awake, Cici and Patricia explain to Lorena that she could not be Miss Puerto Rico even if she wanted to be because she is not actually from Puerto Rico. Lorena insists that she could certainly be Miss Puerto Rico because she "heard Miss Venezuela, she's really from Nicaragua." The

issue is dropped and never mentioned again.

The beauty pageant scene was not, in fact, one that had originally been included in Simón's scripts, but rather, was added by the first two women writers who began revising the script, McGibbon and Parriott. Simón indicates she would never have conceived of such a scene, but remembers suggesting that the thrust of the joke in this context have something to do with the fact that Lorena, who is Mexican (a detail which is, in the end, removed from the film), not be able to impersonate a Puerto Rican because of her lack of cultural knowledge. She remembers explaining in a meeting, "They're gonna ask her, 'What's the capital of Puerto Rico?' She's not gonna know anything. She's Mexican… So that's where the joke is: a Mexican trying to play a Puerto Rican. She's going to be the worst Miss Puerto Rico, ever." Rather than deal with the issue in any meaningful kind of way that might resonate with Latino audiences, however, the film refuses to engage with the topic. Instead of dealing with the reality of Latinas/os' lives, and the ways in which they respond to the construct of pan-ethnic Latinidad in the United States that is imposed upon them, and whether or not they in fact conform to that identity, the film avoids the issue and treats it as nothing more than an opportunity for a joke, without substance.

El Diario La Prensa's Carlos Rodriguez expresses some disappointment with the film's depiction of Latinas/os in the United States, explaining that despite the film's inclusion of figures such as Walter Mercado, and the presence of veiled machismo, which give the film "personality," he felt:

> *apenas exploran las posibilidades de retratar nuestra cultura en EEUU: los protagonistas se definen por su clase social, sin distinción alguna de país de origen, y presentan unos pocos rasgos comunes (como bailar salsa o soltar palabras en español aquí y allá). Tampoco aparece confrontación alguna con el mundo anglo*. / [they barely explore the possibilities of capturing our culture in the United States: the protagonists are defined by their social class, without in any way distinguishing their countries of origin, and they have just a few commonalities (like dancing salsa or throwing in a Spanish word here and there).

There are also never confronted with the Anglo world.][131]

This review indicates that by glossing over the differences that make Latinas/os unique, the studio, in fact, did not bridge the gap between different Latina/o groups. Rather, the lack of cultural specificity calls attention to the fact that the film was not attentive to the realities of Latinas/os' lives, and it was not truly made for them.

Performing Latina Identity

The above-mentioned beauty pageant scene calls attention to the fact that identity is performative, and within the context of the film, Latinas are here shown to willingly choose to perform their identity without loyalty to their home countries/cultures. While the topic leaves room for critique of the manufacture of Latinidad, as well as an exploration of the performance of ethnicity and femininity, the film, itself, provides no such critique. A contentious issue in this case becomes an opportunity for a joke, which ultimately communicates that ethnic origin is undetectable. Lorena is only shown to be an imposter when the real Miss Puerto Rico bursts through the doors and exposes her as such. Thus, Latinas are shown to welcome the opportunity to perform their pan-ethnic identity, particularly when it earns them recognition and acceptance.

The special features of the *Chasing Papi* DVD also complicate the film's stance on the nature of identity in that viewers are lead to believe that Mendoza chose the actors in the film according to their similarities to the characters they play. All three of the actors – Sofia Vergara, Rosalyn Sanchez, and Jaci Velasquez – admit to being similar to the characters they play, in one way or another. Vergara explains she is not quite as flamboyant as her character, but that she is "comfortable" with herself (implying that she is comfortable with her sexuality and her body).

[131] Carlos Rodriguez, "'Chasing Papi,' a la caza del macho," *El Diario La Prensa* (New York) vol. XXXVII, iss. 1317501, April 11, 2003, 30.

Sanchez acknowledges her own similarities to her character when she explains she knew they were going to offer her the part of Lorena, although she hoped for another of the roles. Velazquez says although she hopes she is not as spoiled as her character, she's afraid, perhaps, that she is. Mendoza confirms that Velasquez, although not spoiled in the same way that Patricia is, has been catered to in much the same way as her character, because of her position within the music industry. The special features, intended to assist in marketing the film, indicate that the actors and their characters are, in fact, one and the same. The interviews are performative and the actors embody the stereotypes in the film.

Conclusion

Haubegger has said about the Latina/o public: "we're not a special niche… We are America."[132] Herein lies a significant paradox. On the one hand, the Latinas/os that are of interest to advertisers are marked by their assimilation into the mainstream. They are increasingly English-dominant, and have increasing levels of education and disposable incomes. At the same time, they are viewed as an untapped market with characteristics that distinguish them as being different from general audiences. In the case of *Chasing Papi*, fear of addressing the Latina/o mainstream at the expense of alienating non-Latina/o, mainstream audiences prevented studio executives from addressing the very cultural elements that might help Latinas/os understand a film as being truly created "for" and "about" them. While some research supports that Latinas/os respond favorably to mainstream products that do not reflect the cultural specificity of their experience, and that they do not necessarily hunger for marketing targeting them as Latinas/os,

[132] Lorraine Calvacca, "'Latina' dances into spotlight; Best Magazine: Bilingual monthly breaks through into the mainstream," *Advertising Age*, Mar 13, 2000, S8.

per se,[133] the question remains as to whether Latinas/os reject Latina/o-specific marketing attempts because of their lack of interest in culturally specific products, or if they reject the manner in which advertisers continually fail to grasp the complexity of their realities. As the aforementioned Pew Hispanic Center study shows, while Latinas/os are becoming more accustomed to being addressed and are increasingly self-identifying as Americans who are part of a pan-ethnic Latina/o group, larger numbers of Latinas/os do, in fact, still appreciate having their cultural differences acknowledged. This fact suggests that Latinas/os would be dissatisfied with marketing strategies aimed at pan-ethnic constructs, which might explain why they would prefer not to be addressed as Latinas/os, at all.

The conundrum of considering Latinas/os both a niche market and "American" (like everyone else in the United States) is a complicated task that proved to be more than Fox was prepared to handle. As previously noted, Fox's Tom Roth confirmed the studio's intent of giving the Hispanic audience a Hollywood film "that reflects their lives, culture and humor,"[134] a statement in concert with the original plans for an "authentic" Latina comedy that would also be broad enough to reach larger audiences. Mendoza's intent to make a film, however, that was not about Latina/o culture, directly contradicts Roth's comment and reflects the turn the studio took after Gabler and Whitaker joined the project, when the focus was shifted to a "universal" story populated by Latina characters. Mendoza's approach to the project, then, begs the questions: What makes it "our humor" if it is not culture? What were the characteristics of this Hispanic

[133] In 2005, *Newsweek* reported that the market-research firm, WSL Strategic Retail's Candace Corlett cited a recent study that showed Latino consumers "don't want to be segregated." Jennifer Ordonez, "Marketing: Speak English. Live Latin," *Newsweek*, May 30, 2005, 30. Specifically with regard to film, in 2002, *The Washington Post* also reported that "Latinos will pay to see movies that don't feature Latino characters of story lines," and that according to studio research, "Hispanic Americans" tend to see movies in English. Intending to distinguish their product from Spanish-language films from Latin American countries, the studio decided to keep the film in English. See Waxman, "'Chasing Papi,' and Beckoning a Latino Audience."

[134] Michael Fleming, "Fox tries Latin Beat," *Daily Variety*, June 5, 2002, 7.

audience the studio was attempting to appeal to if not those associated with culture and/or race, which Mendoza indicates were irrelevant?" My research suggests that there was no consensus among the executives and filmmakers involved in the production of *Chasing Papi*, in answer to these questions.

One of the most detrimental events affecting the production of the film was the regime change that took place mid-production and led to shifts in the approach to the audience and the material. Numerous people became involved in the process at different points in time, and unfortunately, the shift involved a dysfunctional communication process and resulted in a project that lacked clear vision. The film was written by what critics referred to as a "flock"[135] or "legion"[136] of writers who contributed to a script that was developed and executed by individuals with conflicting ideas about who constituted the target market, as well as the best way to address them. As a result, the film conveys mixed messages about the community and is what one critic called an "unfocused frenzy."[137] The studio kept a close watch on their investment, a project aimed at a community they knew little to nothing about, and in the process they limited the creative control of the few Latinas who were involved with the film and underutilized the very expertise for which the filmmakers had been hired. This is not to argue that the studio would have ended up with a film any "better" or "worse" had they more closely followed Simón's, Mendoza's, Haubegger's, or any other Latinas' suggestions, for that matter. Rather, it illustrates the lack of clarity about the goals of the film. Was the goal to depict and appeal to English-dominant Latinas/os? In which case, why avoid the cultural specificity of their experience and

[135] Rita Kempley, "Don't Waste Much Time 'Chasing Papi'."

[136] Scott Galupo, "'Chasing Papi' a Dud in Any Language," *The Washington Times*, April 17, 2003, B05.

[137] David Kehr, "3 Wronged Woman [sic] Scratch Out Insight, Not One Another's Eyes," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2003, E5.

cast so many heavily accented actors? If the studio insisted on an English-language film to appeal to as large an audience as possible, why market so heavily through Spanish language media? Why not make a more bilingual film if the studio was going to invest so heavily in marketing to an audience that would understand the language? Was it for fear of alienating non-Latina/o audiences? If fear of alienating non-Latina/o audiences motivated the studio's decisions on so many levels, then why purport to depict a film that reflects their experience, when it is precisely the details of that experience that the studio felt would alienate non-Latina/o viewers?

As explored in the previous chapter, it is certainly common for films to bear little resemblance to the original stories and/or screenplays from which they were born. The implications for a Latina-themed film that was so completely transformed the way that *Chasing Papi* was, however, is particularly profound. The film's credits reveal an unusually high number of Latina/o names and it was marketed as "the first studio movie to reflect the Hispanic experience." Furthermore, as Tajamika Paxton noted, the film was intended to show the wide range of women's directing capabilities, including their facility with comedy. The studio's emphasis on the novelty of the project as a female/Latina-driven and -themed production has led to film being unfairly used as a benchmark in terms of what Latina writers/directors/producers are capable of doing (or rather, not capable of doing, as the case may be). As *El Diario*'s Carlos Rodriguez noted, because of the rare opportunity *Chasing Papi* represented for Latinos, "*por su excepcionalidad, probablemente va a ser percibida como un manifiesto de la comunidad latina, lo cual está lejos de su intención*/[because of its uniqueness, it is probably going to be perceived as a manifesto of the Latino community, which is far from its intention]."[138] The commercial

[138] Carlos Rodriguez, "'Chasing Papi', a la caza del macho."

viability of films targeted at the American Latina/o audience continues to be questioned as a result of its failure.

As Simón notes, the strong connection that has been made between her and the film has not been positive, and she often finds herself defending her talents when potential employers indicate they have reservations about her work, asking for reassurance that they will not end up with another *Chasing Papi*. Her association with the project has been detrimental to her career. Particularly considering Simón's displeasure with the scripts she read after being removed from the project, as well as her thwarted efforts, as a producer, to keep the film as authentic in its appeal to Latino audiences as possible, the idea that this film is so intimately connected to her reputation and consequently her opportunities as a filmmaker is unfortunate. The relative failure of the film reflects not her individual contributions to the film, many of which were ultimately rejected, but rather, the studio's ineffective management of the multiple resources available to them in the making of the film.

Likewise, whether or not Mendoza's directing style translated well from television to film cannot be isolated from the fact that, as Simón indicated, by the time she came onboard, she had inherited a script that had been manipulated by an unusually large number of people with very different visions. Although Mendoza did have a significant amount of creative input to the film, it must be recognized that she was brought onto the project during the last year of a very complicated process. In addition, Mendoza and the studio did not share the same vision of the film.

As a first time feature director, Mendoza notes that she was not, perhaps, particularly well prepared to deal with the executives at Fox. In addition to the learning curve she faced in understanding what was expected of her, she says, for example, "You know, I wish that I had

fought a little bit harder for some cuts," explaining that the beginning of the film was "too lateral" for her liking, and the end of the film was very "clean… just kind of predictable."[139] Although she came onboard the project with no feature comedy experience, she was not the only key player who was inexperienced in certain aspects of the capacity in which she served. While highly skilled and with proven success in particular aspects important to the film, many of the writers and producers, for example, were equally inexperienced in their positions, on other levels. For example, while Simón had proven success with a Latina/o documentary and with comedy writing, she had not written or produced a feature-length comedy before. Haubegger, extremely successful in reaching a relatively untapped Latina/o market, had experience specific to print media and not film. Whitaker's success directing an African-American women's drama that successfully crossed-over into the mainstream did not necessarily indicate expertise regarding producing a comedy about a specifically female perspective on the Latina/o community. The numerous women comedy writers who had written comedies about women did not have experience writing about the Latina/o culture and did not necessarily understand what might be funny to a Latina/o audience. While all of the filmmakers possessed highly desirable skill sets, each faced a unique learning curve with regard to some aspect of the project. The ways that their collective experience and inexperience came together within the context of a studio production is what is responsible for making the film what it is.

It is, of course, important to note that considering the fact that there is no history of Latina/o feature-length comedies in Hollywood, it would have been impossible for Fox to put the film in the hands of experienced Latina/o feature comedy writers, producer, and directors. The film was an experiment and should be recognized as such. As a film consciously targeting and

[139] Mendoza, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

addressing Latina/o culture, notoriously fractured and diverse in terms of language, countries of origin, and degrees of assimilation, however, it would have seemed prudent to prioritize sensitivity to the cultural component of the film. Maintaining Latinas/os at the creative heart of the project, as Trench had initially indicated to Ziskin when the project first got underway, would have been one way to attend to the issue. In this sense, they might have learned from Haubegger's experience with *Latina,* as she has explained that with regard to the magazine, "One of the secrets to our success is that our sales team is largely comprised of women who are in the target market."[140]

The Latinas involved in *Chasing Papi,* however, were not necessarily maintained at the "heart" of the film. The Latina "authorities" with regard to the "authenticity" of the film were not encouraged to discuss their various perspectives on the culture and the content, or to strategize as to how to best reach their audience. In fact, the women rarely (and in most cases, never) had an opportunity to work together,[141] as one might be led to believe, from looking at the credits. Fox exercised a considerable amount of control over their investment and effectively limited the amount of control these Latinas had over the production of their own images. The film should, therefore, be recognized as a reflection of the capabilities of the filmmakers within the confines of a Hollywood studio production during the late 1990s/early 2000s, rather than unduly be judged as an example of the talents and capabilities of Latina filmmakers involved in its production. The studio, in this case, took the expertise of these Latinas under advisement in different stages of the filmmaking process, and utilized their advice as they saw fit.

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[140] Zbar, "Christy Haubegger: Publisher, Latina."

[141] According to Mendoza, she and Haubegger did have a handful of occasions to meet. They did not, however, discuss the script or the representations of Latinas/os in the film, in any way. While it would have been impossible for the studio to keep the women from conferring on the issue of the depictions of Latinas/os in the film, Mendoza was not particularly concerned with the issue, and the studio did not prioritize it enough to encourage a discussion between them.

The fact that they carry so much of the weight of the film's failure on their shoulders (particularly Simón and Mendoza) recalls the words of Mollie Gregory, who described the industry's attitude towards women in the 1990s and moving into the 2000s. Gregory notes that during this time, a wider variety of writing, directing, and producing opportunities were becoming available to women. She quotes Georgia Jeffries, who describes her experience of being offered an opportunity on an unnamed television drama series (the phenomenon, she notes, is similar in the world of feature filmmaking), explaining Jeffries was invited to meet with the producer because it had become "fashionable" to hire women. The intention was to expand the demographics of the audience as well as to repair the reputation of one of the stars, who has known to have "objectionable attitudes toward women." Gregory notes that it takes generations to change attitudes, and therefore indicates it should not be particularly surprising that "the perception of women as window dressing" persists. Women's increased opportunities, then, do not necessarily represent a desire to change images of women in film or the industry's relationship to them.[142]

The example of *Chasing Papi* illustrates that the same holds true for the opportunities available to women filmmakers of Latin American decent, who in this case, ultimately served as a method of branding a film that the studio hoped would appeal to an untapped market. Fox assembled a team of filmmakers who contributed distinct resources and reflected varying interests of their respective communities, and together, they left a collective signature on the film that reflects the material conditions under which the film was made. As David Bordwell explains it, the "authorial signature across an oeuvre constitutes an economically exploitable

[142] Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 310.

trademark."[143] When considered in Bordwell's terms, the collective signature of the Latinas behind *Chasing Papi* can be interpreted as one such exploitable trademark, which has become increasingly marketable in an environment where Latina/o culture is so highly commodified.

Simón explains that an unidentified Latina filmmaker she knows says that as she sees it, Latinas have two options in terms of how they can choose to be involved in a studio picture: "You're either gonna bow down and cry in the parking lot or you're going to speak out and be labeled problematic. And you don't win either way." Simón vacillated between the two positions throughout her involvement with the project and says she early compromised on many things, such as agreeing to write in partnership with another writer. She says, however, that because of her previous experience at Disney – the same experience that had taught her structure and comedy writing, which enabled her to make a successful pitch to Ziskin – she "also understood the obstacles and thought, somebody's got to take the abuse."

As Simón sees it, one of the biggest problems in the Hollywood studio system when it comes to making Latina/o films is the lack of Latinas/os in executive positions. For as she explains, non-Latina/o executives see Latinas/os as interchangeable. For example, "they get rid of me and they just replace me with another Latina…. As long as they have some insight into the culture, it doesn't occur to them… some people have unique talents" that make them better suited for particular work than others.[144] The studio, in this case, may have chosen each of the Latinas for particular talents that they recognized, but they failed to understand the range of those talents that would make them particularly well suited to particular tasks, as Simón suggests. They failed to recognize the nuances of their perspectives on the culture, and how that would inform

[143] David Bordwell, "Authorship and Narration in Art Cinema," in *Film and Authorship*, ed. Virginia Wright Wexman (New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 46.

[144] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

the way each would/could leave their mark on the film. As Simón has noted, poking fun at "culture is the dangerous thing to do. You better know the culture so you're not offending the culture."[145] In the case of *Chasing Papi,* there were, plainly speaking, too many cooks in the kitchen (many of whom were unfamiliar with Latina/o culture), and despite what the credits of the film would lead one to believe, surprisingly few of those cooks were Latina.

In contrast to *Chasing Papi*, a production in which the inconsistent leadership and lack of focus manifested on-screen, *Frida* (2002), which also underwent a tumultuous development process and involved an unusually large number of writers, resulted in a cohesive and critically acclaimed film. *Frida* is an example of another Latina-themed Hollywood film that was made in the late 1990s/early 2000s, but unlike *Chasing Papi*, the film was spearheaded by a filmmaker with a strong vision, which persisted from beginning to end: actor/producer/director Salma Hayek.

Although there was potential for Laura Angélica Simón to wield a significant amount of creative control over *Chasing Papi* as both a writer and producer, she was not well established within the Hollywood film industry at the time the film was made. This fact made her particularly vulnerable to the studio executives who gained the authority to strip her of the creative control that she had been given by Ziskin (who had initially taken a risk on her) when Ziskin left the studio, mid-development. The lack of consistent vision that resulted from the change in studio management and the multitude of writers who contributed to the screenplay was not an issue that plagued the production of *Frida*, despite the large number of people who worked on the film.

[145] Simón, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

The following discussion of Hayek's career as a well-established Hollywood star who uses her star power to obtain control over other aspects of the films on which she work (particularly in the discussion of *Frida*) illustrates the importance of maintaining a unified vision throughout the production of a feature film. Furthermore, it highlights that the unifying force is not necessarily the director, as is so often assumed to be the case. Although both Simón and Hayek share the title of "Producer" on their respective films, the power they had to shape the final films could not be more different from one another. The following chapter explores the ways in which some Latinas have accessed opportunities behind the camera via the power they attain as Hollywood stars. Using Hayek as one of the most prominent examples of a Latina who is creating change in the Hollywood industry, the following chapter investigates the ways in which stars construct their own images in ways that conform to industry expectations while also negotiating a space for themselves and other Latinas/os to create new images that explore the diversity of the Latina/o experience.

Chapter Five

Salma Hayek: Stars Producing/Producing Stars

This inquiry into Latina producers' influence over the production of their own images (meaning that of their own Chicana/o, Latina/o, and women's communities, among others) has, thus far, explored case studies of individual filmmakers and/or film productions that illustrate the ways in which Latinas have been able to expand the variety of images to which audiences are exposed, as well as the ways in which they have been able to subvert dominant stereotypes and the ways in which those efforts have been limited. The following analysis shifts focus to the phenomenon of Latina stars who have become producers and investigates their efforts at self-representation, more literally, as many of the women have become producers to pursue their desire for better, more complicated/challenging roles for themselves and other Latina/o actors who face the same obstacles to exploring the range of their talents.

While the previous three chapters of this study have largely been based upon oral histories with Latina filmmakers and others involved in the production of the films they have produced, this final chapter necessarily deviates from that methodological approach. In contrast to the Latina producers who I have discussed thus far, whose work goes virtually unnoticed by the public, Latina stars are characterized by and have gained power precisely as a result of the public discourse that has developed about them in popular culture. That discourse is largely built not around their professional accomplishments, but rather, around their personal lives, which are of much more interest to the public, making it difficult to assess the actual work that they do. In addition, as high profile figures, the images of Latina stars are highly guarded and manipulated by agents, managers, publicists, and numerous individuals who manage their interests, making them relatively inaccessible to scholars and journalists, for example, interested in investigating

their efforts. What follows is a brief historical account of the phenomenon of the star-turned-producer, followed by an analysis of the discourse around Mexican-born, Salma Hayek, one of the biggest Latina stars in the U.S., who has also become one of the most highly visible Latina producers in Hollywood today.

Limiting Latina Actresses

Roseanna Arquette's documentary film, *Searching for Debra Winger*,[1] explores the consequences for contemporary actresses who face difficult choices as they attempt to balance their family lives and careers, with the latter being dependent upon their sexuality and their youthful appearances. As Arquette notes, and many of the women who she interviews confirm, women are generally considered beyond their prime and "put out to pasture" by the age of forty in Hollywood. Actresses find it much more difficult to secure work after that age, until they have aged much more substantially, that is. As Martha Plimpton describes in the film, women have two opportunities to work in the business: as "either a starlet or an old hag character actress."

The Hollywood film industry has long been critiqued for objectifying women and portraying them as inferior to men, as well as proliferating a myriad of negative stereotypes.[2] As the women in Arquette's documentary explain, they are regularly cast as victims and girlfriends, and rarely given the opportunity to play characters with much depth. Samantha Mathis notes that more and more women are accepting television roles because competition for the few "good roles" in film

[1] *Searching for Debra Winger*, directed by Rosanna Arquette (Los Angeles, CA: Flower Child Productions, 2002), DVD.

[2] See, for example: Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990);

is so fierce, while the television industry appears to be more interested in "showing women in a more real way."[3]

For actresses of color, the difficulty of securing work, so greatly affected by gender discrimination, is compounded by racial discrimination. For as Russell Robinson notes, women and people of color face a double bind, as actors: "If they refuse stereotypical roles, they face economic hardship; if they accept stereotypical roles, they increase damage to self- and group identity."[4] Robinson's study of 171 commercial releases from the year 2005, with budgets over one million dollars showed that men are almost three times as likely to be cast in lead roles than women, whites representing eighty-two percent of those lead roles. While women fare better in supporting roles, they remain outnumbered by men and, of the roles that women occupy, Latinas remain severely underrepresented, constituting only 1.2 percent.

Mary Beltrán comments on the ambivalent status of Latinas/os in the media in the introduction to her book-length study, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meaning of Film and TV Stardom*. She notes that in more recent years, they have been gaining access to more multi-dimensional roles, although the prevalence of stereotypes does persist. In considering the recent increase in critical recognition of Latina/o actors (for example, Jennifer Lopez, Benicio del Toro, and American Ferrera) and the increasing number of Latina/o filmmakers and producers behind successful films and television programs in the U.S., Beltrán asks, "Should the success of these individuals be taken as a sign of improvements for Latina/os in Hollywood with

[3] *Searching for Debra Winger*.

[4] Russell Robinson, "Hollywood's Race/Ethnicity and Gender-Based Casting: Prospects for a Title VII Lawsuit," *Latino Policy and Issues Brief* no. 14 (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, December 2006): 3.

respect to opportunity, creative agency, or star promotion?"[5] While she says it is still too soon to tell, Beltrán does indicate that the impact and visibility Latina/o stars have in Hollywood will likely continue to increase.

Star Producing Patterns

For Latina stars, the potential they have to make an impact on the industry is particularly significant, for stardom has provided an important point of entry for Latinas aiming to make their mark from behind the scenes of feature films. In addition to the access Latinas have gained to the means of production byway of their partnerships with Latino directors (such as the cases of Josey Faz and Elizabeth Avellán), as well as through the genre of romantic comedies (such the filmmakers involved with *Chasing Papi*, and the many independent features that thrived at approximately the same time), several Latina stars have been able to convert their star power into producing power since the 1990s.[6] In many cases, these Latina stars-turned-producers have been able to exercise increased amounts of control over the production of their own images, as well as those of other Latinas/os in film and other entertainment media. In fact, the phenomenon is not new. Rather, these Latina filmmakers follow in the footsteps of a number of Hollywood actresses who have taken advantage of their star status in order to gain control over their own images.

Although the star system was not in place at the industry's inception, the power that film stars wield was recognized almost immediately, once it began to develop. During the 1910s, with the rise of the fiction film, individual performers began to draw audiences that were

[5] Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meaning of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 7.

[6] Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek are the two most prominent, prolific, and successful examples, but other actresses such as Eva Longoria, Rosalyn Sanchez, and America Ferrera, for example, are also making their way behind the scenes.

interested, specifically, in their particular talents to perform fictive events. Stars became a way for filmmakers attempting to gain a foothold in the emerging industry to differentiate between their products in a market so saturated with films. Stars' identities, which are produced through discourse, are intertextual, and as Richard deCordova notes, not innate to the stars themselves.[7] Richard Dyer further explains that stardom is "an image of the way stars live."[8] This attaches value to the star's personal life and the discourse around it, for it is the audience's extratextual knowledge about the star that adds meaning to their experience of the films in which they perform, and it is that same knowledge and the meaning thereby created that draws them to their films.

While film companies and studios quickly learned to profit from their stars, the history of actors recognizing their own economic value and converting it into producing power can also be traced back to the 1910s, not long after the star system began to develop. Tino Balio notes that Mary Pickford's negotiations with Adolph Zukor and his Famous Players Film Company finally resulted in Zukor's creating the Mary Pickford Studio and Artcraft distribution company, making Pickford "the first star to produce her own pictures and to win a considerable degree of control over her work."[9] Soon after, in 1919, Pickford and fellow stars, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin, founded United Artists along with director D.W. Griffith. Balio describes the actors as being "the first among their ranks to perceive the economic implications of stardom."[10]

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[7] Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 12.

[8] Richard Dyer, "Stars as Images," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. David Marshall (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 154.

[9] Tino Balio, "Stars in Business," in *The American Film Industry*, revised edition, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 160.

[10] Ibid.

As the studio era began to take root, the vertically integrated studios built their businesses around their most bankable stars, who were their most valuable assets. As Cathy Klaprat notes, "Stars established the value of motion pictures as a marketable commodity. In economic terms, stars by virtue of their unique appeal and drawing power stabilized rental prices and guaranteed that the companies operated at a profit."[11] Female stars became particularly valuable as the Hollywood studio system was put in place, for the female audience was early recognized as an important segment of the population, and was targeted by female-centered stories, again, as early as the 1910s.[12] By the 1930s, female stars such as Bette Davis and Joan Crawford commanded large audiences and consequently, large salaries. This explains why contemporary actor Holly Hunter looks back nostalgically at the acting opportunities available to women during the 1940s, at the height of the studio era. Hunter notes, in addition to their incredible charisma, and in contrast to the opportunities available to actresses today, actresses in the 1940s "had so much power."[13]

The studios did, however, actively attempt to limit their stars' power through the long-term option contract, which Klaprat explains, effectively made stars "indentured employees."[14] There were a select few women, such as Barbara Stanwyck, Carole Lombard, and Clara Bow, for example, who were able to negotiate the terms of their own labor and establish what Emily

[11] Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light," in *The American Film Industry*, revised edition, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 351.

[12] Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 235.

[13] *Searching for Debra Winger*.

[14] Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy," 351.

Carman calls "independent stardom," during the 1930s.[15] However, the careers of most were at the mercy of the studio heads. Stars often struggled over creative control of the roles they played and the ways in which their images were marketed during the studio era, which began to deteriorate during the 1950s.

Actor Ida Lupino, for example, founded the production company, The Filmakers, with Collier Young, who was her husband at the time. Lupino's acting career spanned five decades, from the 1930s to the 1970s, and she directed (as well as wrote and produced) numerous films and television programs between the late 1940s and late 1960s, many of which revolved around controversial social issues. Lupino has served as a role model for many women filmmakers, including Latina star-turned-producer/director, Salma Hayek, who says she has learned from Lupino's work.[16] In 1972, Lupino remarked, with regard to the dearth of opportunities available to women, "I'd love to see more women working as directors and producers. Today it's almost impossible to do it unless you are an actress or a writer with power."[17]

Rita Hayworth is another early (Latina) example of an actress who, in 1947, used the power she attained as an actress to set up her own production company, the Beckworth Corporation.[18] She starred in all four of the films that the company produced between 1948 and 1954,[19] and she did secure final approval on the scripts and shared in the profits of the films. Hayworth's

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[15] Emily Carman, "Independent Stardom: Female Stars and Freelance Labor in 1930s Hollywood," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 4.

[16] Roberto Cazorla, "Salma Hayek y su fidelidad a México," *El Latino (*San Diego) vol. XV, iss. 41, October 17, 2002, 1.

[17] Ally Acker, *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993) 77.

[18] Adrienne L. McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 12.

[19] The films include: *The Loves of Carmen* (1948), *Affair in Trinidad* (1952), *Salome* (1953), and *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1954).

producing career, however, was short-lived, and she worked predominantly as an actor for nearly two decades after the last film that the Beckworth Corporation produced was made.[20]

While Lupino and Hayworth are two notable examples of women who worked behind the scenes during the studio era, they are certainly exceptions, rather than the rule. Furthermore, as Mollie Gregory notes, by the early 1970s, "Major female film stars did not have their own production companies," and in fact, between the 1920s and 1970s, she emphasizes that "only a handful [of women] produced films."[21] The civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 70s, however, brought attention to the depiction of women in film and television, as well as to employment statistics that clearly evidenced women's exclusion from the industry. Gregory explains many women's committees and organizations formed to provide support for women entering the business[22] and there were "profound economic and creative alterations"[23] taking place in the entertainment industry, which led to many women gaining access to opportunities, first in television, and then in the business of motion pictures.

With regard to stars, who are now regularly expanding their efforts from acting to filmmaking, they are certainly no longer under the same kind of control that the studios exercised prior to the Paramount Decree of 1948, which put an end to vertical integration and led to the demise of the studio system. Relevant to the examination of Hayek and other stars-turned-producers in the contemporary era, particularly after the 1990s, stars began to command increasingly inflated salaries and make more demands with regard to the creative control of their

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[20] Hayworth is also credited as a producer on the film, *The Happy Thieves* (1962), which was produced by Hillworth Productions, the production company that she established with her then-husband, James Hill.

[21] Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 3.

[22] Ibid., xiv.

[23] Ibid., xiii.

films. Because "studios' dependence on a small crop of A-list stars was making them vulnerable to these demands,"[24] complaints that stars, even when they remain in front of the camera, are allowed to call too many shots are now quite common.

Geoff King notes that stars regularly set up production companies, although the reasoning behind their formation varies widely (as does the degree of their effectiveness and success). He explains that in some cases, the production companies are set up so that stars can avoid paying taxes,[25] while in others, studios make deals that industry analysts refer to as "'vanity deals'…designed to stroke a star performer's ego more than in the expectation of concrete production."[26] There are yet other occasions when actors "attempt to gain greater control over the kinds of projects with which the star is involved, whether *as* star or in the arena of producing or directing."[27] Contemporary examples of men who have successfully followed this path from acting to producing and directing include Clint Eastwood, Robert Redford, and Matt Damon, just to name a few. Contemporary women include actors such as Jodie Foster, Barbara Streisand, and more recently, Angelina Jolie, for example. The opportunities available to women producers and directors, however, remain limited. There may be more avenues available to them at present than at the time Lupino noted it was only by obtaining power as an actor or a writer that women might hope to move into producing or directing. Still, establishing star power does remain one of the most effective ways for them to secure some degree of creative control behind the scenes.

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[24] Martin Barker, introduction to *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*, ed. Thomas Barker and Martin Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

[25] Geoff King, "Stardom in the Willennium," in *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*, ed. Thomas Barker and Martin Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69.

[26] King, "Stardom in the Willenium," 72.

[27] Ibid., 69.

Producing Salma Hayek

Mexican-born Salma Hayek came to the United States to further her acting career after becoming a star in her native country, where she played the lead role in the popular telenovela, *Teresa* (1989-1991). Upon her arrival to the U.S., however, Hayek spoke limited English and had a heavy accent, which contributed to the difficulty she had landing roles. She was initially only able to secure a few television appearances and a bit part in Allison Anders's *Mi Vida Loca* (1993). Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellán stumbled upon on a Spanish-language talk show, during which Hayek discussed the lack of opportunities for Latina actresses such as herself in the U.S. After seeing Hayek on television, Rodriguez decided he wanted her to be the leading lady of his next film, *Desperado*.[28] Avellán, who had established a relationship with Anders through the festival circuit, immediately contacted the filmmaker and began doing the legwork to make it happen.

Hayek, however, was not an easy sell to the studios, as Columbia Pictures was not confident she would be able to carry a leading role. So, when Rodriguez found the production of *Desperado* delayed for unrelated reasons, he accepted an offer to direct *Roadracers* and cast Hayek in the role opposite leading man, David Arquette. Rodriguez's intent was to prove that Hayek had enough on-screen presence for Columbia to allow him to cast her in *Desperado*, which it did.

It is important to note that although the previous decade, "The Decade of the Hispanic," had provided increased visibility for a handful of Latina/o actors,[29] as Avellán notes, the acting bench

[28] Michael Atkinson, "Take a Hayek," *Interview*, February 1997, 114.

[29] See Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes*, 108-111. Beltrán notes, for example, that actor Edward James Olmos received "intense publicity" and promotion during this time. She further explains that "a cadre of Latina/o and other nonwhite actors found acting opportunities and in fact compelling starring roles."

from which filmmakers were choosing was quite small, and only a few actors were being used, repeatedly, at this time.[30] Edward James Olmos, for example, was "the most ubiquitous actor in the string of Latino-directed films that were released in the 1980s."[31] As filmmaker/film scholar John Pierson explains it, giving both Hayek and Banderas their first real chance in the business, Rodriguez and Avellán served as a "catalyst" for increasing opportunities for a larger number of Latina/o actors to enter the mainstream.[32]

This is not to say, however, that Rodriguez and Avellán "discovered" Hayek. Cathy Klaprat explains that during the studio era, "stars were created, not discovered, counter to popular myths,"[33] and the same holds true, today. Hayek, in fact, struggled to become a star, even after her successful role in *Desperado*. She was cast in Rodriguez's next film, *Four Rooms*, and played the bit part of the "TV dancing girl," whose bikini-clad body briefly appears on a television screen in the same segment ("The Misbehavers") in which Banderas plays the leading role. Hayek says she initially resisted the role Rodriguez offered her as it only focused on her physical appearance. However, Hayek says that because she felt an obligation to the filmmaker, who had just given her the first leading role of her feature film career, she agreed. She stipulated that her face not be included in the shot, so she would not be recognizable. Rodriguez agreed, but

[30] "Elizabeth Avellan," interview by John Pierson on February 10, 2010, RTF Master Class, Radio Television Film, College of Communication, The University of Texas, accessed June 15, 2011, http://rtf.utexas.edu/masterclass/audio/elizabeth-avellan.

[31] Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes*, 126.

[32] "Elizabeth Avellan," interview by John Pierson.

[33] Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy," 351-352.

then identified her by name in the credits of the film, which Hayek says made her feel as though Rodriguez had "sabotaged" her.[34]

Rodriguez also cast Hayek as vampiress, Satanico Pandemoni, in the 1995 film, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, one of the most memorable roles of her career, which similarly highlights her physicality rather than allowing her to explore her acting ability. Hayek's phobia of snakes made the role particularly difficult, as the majority of the character's screen time is spent in an extended dance sequence with a python wrapped around her body. Given that the character is killed almost immediately after the dance ends, the sequence essentially constitutes the role. Avellán remembers that Hayek was told she would lose the role to Madonna if she did not prove she could handle it by dancing with a large snake that Rodriguez and Avellán had at their home. She remembers Hayek's panic as she asked Avellán, "What do I do?!" Avellán recognized the importance of Hayek's landing the role and enlisted the help of her brother, Joaquín Avellán (who was an editor on the film, as well as *Four Rooms*, and *Desperado* (uncredited)), to drape the snake around his own body and then slide Hayek underneath the snake with him. Together, the brother and sister coached Hayek through what was essentially an audition, and Hayek spent months overcoming her fear of snakes in order to make it through the production.

Avellán says she knew how important the opportunity was because she "saw [Hayek] was gonna be a huge star. Huge. No doubt. She had 'it.' …As a producer you have moments like that when you see somebody and go that girl's got 'it.'"[35] In 1996, journalist Brian McCreight explained that scenes such as the python dance in *From Dusk Till Dawn*, as well as the love

[34] Helen Barlow, "Sizzling screen siren set for superstardom," *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), April 9, 1996, Arts 14.

[35] Elizabeth Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, Austin, Texas, October 10, 2011.

scene in *Desperado*, are precisely the roles that gained her notoriety in the U.S. and "plague Hayek's existence."[36]

Hayek has, from the beginning of her career in the U.S., been vocal about her desire to be taken seriously as an actress, bemoaning the fact that she is rarely given the opportunity to prove she is more than just a pretty face. Her first several roles in the U.S. focused on her sex appeal and failed to explore her acting potential. Despite the attention she received after her groundbreaking roles in Rodriguez's films, more substantial, well-paying jobs continued to elude her. Hayek finally reached a critical point, after making *From Dusk Till Dawn*, where her financial situation threatened her dream of becoming a Hollywood star. Having run out of savings, she was on the verge of being forced to abandon her dreams and return to Mexico. Avellán remembers the moment in Hayek's career, explaining that she truly believed in Hayek's ability and so offered the actress $6,000 of her own money,[37] which allowed her more time to pursue her acting career in the U.S. Soon after, Hayek made *Fled* (1996) and *Fools Rush In* (1997), and as Avellán says, "things just began to happen."[38]

Hayek on Hayek

In 1996, Hayek was reported to have made a conscious effort to shift the direction her career was taking by asking her agent to seek "character-driven, rather than action-led" roles, which

[36] Brian McCreight, "Knee-deep in Hoopla," *Premiere,* August 1996, 63.

[37] Both Avellán and Hayek have made note of the loan. See Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas, and Robert Hofler, "The Wild One," *Premiere*, June 1999, 103. It is important to note that at this point in her career, Avellán was not yet earning a significant amount of money. As described at the beginning of this chapter, she had, in fact, earned no salary for her work on *Desperado* and had agreed to a salary of $25,000 for *From Dusk Til Dawn*, which had not yet been filmed. Her generosity and willingness to sacrifice her own financial resources in support of Hayek's career, is significant.

[38] Avellán, personal interview by Mirasol Riojas.

landed her a part in the independent film, *Breaking Up* (1997), opposite Russell Crowe. Hayek said she turned down a blockbuster film to take the part of an "intellectual, not especially good-looking" character.[39] She was reported to have begun making efforts to "turn down all the predictable sexpot roles,"[40] and by early 1997, Robert Dominguez claimed that Hayek was able to "pick and choose roles"[41] without having to resort to the types she had played early in her career. He cites her role in *Fools Rush In* as an example of the shift in direction her career seemed to be taking, and quotes Hayek as noting she was attracted to the part because she "saw the possibility of playing a real woman." She appreciated that it gave her the opportunity "to show a range," although the film received what Dominguez calls "lukewarm" reviews. In 1999, Hayek also indicated that she was pleased with the role she played in *The Velocity of Gary* (1999), an independent film in which she played a quirky donut house waitress involved in an unconventional love triangle between Hayek's character, Mary Carmen; an ex-porn star, Valentino; and his lover, Gary. Hayek was invested in the film because she said she "loved the part."[42] She felt the character was very different from her own experience and although she was aware that few people would see the film, when the filmmakers were unable to find the money to make it, she says she "became a producer and helped them find it." She founded the production company, Ventanarosa in 1999, and *The Velocity of Gary* was the first project with which it was associated.

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[39] "That's Salsa with an 'm,'" *Scotland on Sunday* (UK), May 26, 1996, 15.

[40] McCreight, "Knee-deep in Hoopla."

[41] Robert Dominguez, "Hayek Aims to Shed Sex-Mex Image: Don't 'Rush' to Judgment About her Acting Skills Says Ex-soap Star," *The Daily News* (New York), February 19, 1997, 29.

[42] Portman, "Salma Hayek craves Hollywood stardom: Talk to the actress, and you detect a determination to raise the profile of Hispanics, writes Jamie Portman," *The Ottowa Citizen*, July 17, 1999, E2.

Several additional factors motivated Hayek to establish Ventanarosa. There were, of course, tax incentives,[43] which Hayek notes as her primary motivation when the venture began. Hayek has, however, hoped to make a difference by taking a more active role behind the camera, since founding the company. As journalist Jamie Portman reported, for example, Hayek was "infuriated" by the casting of Welsh actress, Catharine Zeta-Jones as a Latina character in the 1998 film, *The Mask of Zorro*, as well as by other similar casting patterns in the industry.[44] With the founding of Ventanarosa, Hayek has aimed to secure better roles for herself as well as for other Latina/o actors.

In an article that was printed only one month before the Canadian article by Portman, from which the previous quotes about her satisfaction with the roles were taken, the discourse in the U.S. about Hayek and her satisfaction with the opportunities she had been given appeared quite different, as though Hayek had been dissatisfied with all of her previous roles. In July of 1999, Hofler explained that Hayek's early roles, including those she had expressed she felt were the types of opportunities for which she longed, such as those she played in *Fools Rush In* and *The Velocity of Gary,* were somewhat disappointing. He explains that Hayek:

> mostly had to settle for throwaway roles, in movies such as the Cindy Crawford vehicle *Fair Game*.... Although she kept working (e.g. *Fools Rush In, 54,* the just-released indie *The Velocity of Gary*), the routine Kewpie doll from Tijuana began to pall on the actress. "Yes, yes, I was tired," Hayek says before quickly dismissing the subject altogether. "But not anymore. I'm doing *Frida!*"[45]

The majority of the films Hofler mentions with disdain were made after *From Dusk Till Dawn*,

[43] "'I said, I'm a big shot now and I want a bigger part," *The Guardian* (London), July 7, 1999, 14.

[44] Portman, "Salma Hayek craves Hollywood stardom."

[45] Robert Hofler, "The Wild One," *Premiere*, June 1999, 103-104.

which was released the same year as Hayek supposedly stopped accepting the "sexpot roles" and began seeking better opportunities. Of the list, only *Fair Game* was made prior to 1996. In the 2002 film, *Frida,* to which Hayek refers in the quote, above, she plays the lead role. That role would become, in fact, the most critically and commercially successful of Ventanarosa's film productions and it remains the most celebrated of Hayek's acting career, thus far. Without acknowledging her involvement in the production of *The Velocity of Gary*, or her previous comments about being pleased with some of the roles he mentions in the Hofler article, however, Hayek appears at last, as a result of taking a lead in the production of the film, to be satisfied with the opportunity she has made for herself. Despite having commented upon her ability to progressively secure better roles, Hayek and Hofler, in this case, construct her as being responsible for creating the only acceptable acting opportunities she has received, for herself.

A similar shift in Hayek's reports of her own "success" and the control she claims to have had over her career is discernible when looking at the way she describes the period following her early role in *Desperado*. Hayek did, in 1999, speak frankly about the financial difficulties she had after making *Desperado*, explaining to *Premiere*'s Robert Hofler that after making the film, which she thought had secured her success, she "couldn't get arrested."[46] She was not, however, as open about the situation just a few years earlier, in May of 1996, when she explained to the UK's *Scotland on Sunday*:

> After Desperado I had to change my phone number because all the people who didn't want to know me four years ago suddenly wanted to be friends again. I was no longer this poor little Mexican girl, but someone who had dollar appeal. Whereas previously they tried to limit me to Latin girl parts because they said I had an accent, looked too ethnic and acted too exotic, suddenly they could work around scripts to accommodate me.[47]

[46] Hofler, "The Wild One."

[47] "That's Salsa with an 'm."

In the aforementioned 1997 interview with Robert Dominguez, who referred to her role in *Fair Game* as "window dressing," Hayek justified accepting the role by explaining, "Honestly, I needed the money."[48] In 2000, in reference to *Studio 54*, she similarly explained that she accepted the part in the film and others like it, "*cuyo guion no la tenia convencida, pero cuya paga le permitira participar como productora en un proyecto que le entusiasma*/[whose scripts didn't have her convinced, but whose salaries permit her to participate as a producer, in projects for which she does have enthusiasm]," [49] such as *Frida*.

As an intelligent, educated woman with good business sense and formal training as an actor,[50] Hayek has clearly hoped for more respect than what is generally afforded beautiful women in Hollywood, typically valued for their appearance and/or assumed to be without substance. She has referred to her preference for becoming a "good" actress,[51] and her desire for "power," [52] as opposed to money or fame, for example. Having been introduced to American audiences as a sex symbol, however, she has routinely had to position herself as someone who is gaining the respect she desires, as someone who has gained control over her own image. With regard to her "bombshell" image, she told Oprah Winfrey in an interview that appeared in *O, The Oprah Magazine* in 2003, that at one point she felt, "'I have become what they decided I am.

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[48] Dominguez, "Hayek Aims to Shed Sex-Mex Image," 29.

[49] "Salma Hayek suena con Personificar a Frida Kahlo," *Bohemio News* (San Francisco, CA) vol. 40, iss. 46, November 15, 2000, 10.

[50] Hayek trained at the Stella Adler Conservatory. See Rene Rodriguez, "Salma: Living free, like Frida," *Hispanic*, October 2002, 32.

[51] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/2.

[52] See, for example, Mike Figgis, "Salma Hayek," in *Projections*, ed. Mike Figgis (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 157.

When did I fall in this trap?' Somebody decided I was this, and I became that. And I said, I'm going to change it now. I'm going to define myself."[53] As has been shown, with each attempt at establishing herself as a serious actor, Hayek makes claims to achieving her desired goal. Her performances, however, are rarely recognized as great accomplishments (*Frida*, which earned her an Oscar nomination, being an exception, rather than the rule). In fact, many of her performances continue to be based around her physical appearance and conform to existing stereotypes of Latinas in the media.

For example, her character in *The Velocity of Gary*, which Hayek claims to have "loved," conforms closely to the Latin spitfire stereotype: hot blooded and highly sexualized (albeit in a more bohemian context), Mary Carmen rattles off Spanish dialogue in moments of emotional distress. Reviews of *Fools Rush In* routinely criticized the film treatment of Isabel's Mexican heritage as racist and condescending, and Hayek's entrée into comedy was overwhelming described in negative terms.[54] In addition, Hayek notes that with regard to this film, in which she played a pregnant woman, she was disappointed to find that she was still seen as "sexy." She explains that she reflected upon the role, thinking, "I guess I'm reduced to that now. That's all I am in the perception of these people."[55] Unable to deny the reception of her work, or the fact that she continues to accept roles that objectify her in ways she has so vocally opposed, Hayek is forced to continually reframe her career trajectory after the films she has attempted to promote as showcasing her acting abilities fail to receive the recognition she anticipated.

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[53] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/7.

[54] See, for example, Gary Arnold, "'Fools' meet disaster," *The Washington Times*, February 14, 1997, C11; Andrew Paxman, "Crossover Dreams," *Variety*, May 10 – 16, 1999, C4.

[55] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/5.

Hayek's shifting attitude with regard to the control she has had over her career and the roles she has played is not unlike what Rebecca Williams describes in relation to Drew Barrymore's negotiation of her own star persona, which is routinely conflated with the roles that she plays. Williams explains that those negotiations are due to "the economic necessities of the industry and the need for the star to market themselves as a malleable, versatile commodity whilst simultaneously promoting their current film." Furthermore, she explains:

> Star agency is best thought of as 'performed agency'. It foregrounds the representation of the celebrity as sole author of their star persona (their ability to select roles) without acknowledging the collaborative nature of the film-making process and the multi-faceted publicity industries within which it operates.[56]

To be clear, this is not to say that Hayek has not truly obtained increased power and control over her own career. Rather, it is to say that power has not necessarily been obtained when and how Hayek and/or her publicists, agents, and the media has claimed; nor has that power allowed her to escape the demands and expectations so regularly placed upon actresses who are primarily valued for their physical appearance. Quite the contrary, Hayek has gained increasing control over her image, but the power she has attained is inextricably linked with her sexuality and her ability to manipulate it for her own purposes. She recounted to filmmaker Mike Figgis, for example, in an interview for *Projections*, a request *The Jay Leno* show made when she was scheduled to appear as a guest after the making of *Desperado*. Hayek says she was asked to wear a short skirt and to show some cleavage when she appeared on the show, which she agreed to do. When the date arrived, however, she was short on funds and could find no other sponsor besides Hugo Boss, which she was only able to secure because of a personal connection

[56] Rebecca Williams, "From *Beyond Control* to In Control: Investigating Drew Barrymore's Feminist Agency/Authorship," in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (Los Angeles and London: Sage Publications, 2007), 119-120.

she had at the designer's shop. The designer provided Hayek with a man's suit, which she wore for the television appearance, instead of the sexy attire that had previously been suggested to her. Leno commented on her suit, which did not seem to match the "sexy" character she played in *Desperado*. Hayek says she responded, "But underneath this suit I'm wearing the most fantastic lingerie." Figgis notes that Hayek "played" Leno, which she agreed: "I always play him, Mike. I always play them all. You have to."[57]

As Richard Dyer notes, "star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to 'manage' or resolve."[58] Hayek's highly sexualized image conforms to traditional notions of femininity and beauty, and that image is what has enabled her to slowly attain the power she has. That image, however, stands in direct opposition to Hayek's desired image of a woman with intellect and power within the industry, for as Williams notes, "star agency is clearly demarcated between those who have 'too much' control and those who do not possess enough," the former being gendered as masculine, the latter as feminine (Jodie Foster being one example of a star who has gained power within the industry, and who has been categorized as masculine in the media).[59] The contradiction for women who gain power within the industry is difficult to negotiate, particularly for women whose images are so tightly bound to normative standards of femininity and beauty.

Hayek's shifting attitude towards her highly sexualized image, so crucial to her success, is exemplary of the negotiations that stars must make with regard to such contradictions. For the majority of Hayek's roles (other than *Frida,* which will subsequently be discussed) continue to

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[57] Figgis, "Salma Hayek," 157.

[58] Dyer, "Stars as Images," 153.

[59] Rebecca Williams, "From *Beyond Control* to In Control: Investigating Drew Barrymore's Feminist Agency/Authorship," 111-112.

fail to earn her respect as a serious actress, and she continues to accept films in which she appears as a highly sexualized, often racialized character. For example, in *After the Sunset* (2004), she was cast as one of the protagonists of the film, a retired diamond thief, opposite Pierce Brosnan. The opening scenes of the film contain numerous sexual innuendos and costume changes that highlight Hayek's figure, as well as gratuitous shots, such as the camera being placed at a high angle to focus the viewers' attention on her ample cleavage as she peers under the hood of an SUV, which appears early in the film.

Bandidas (2006) billed "itself as a Mexicanized, feminized 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.'" A story about two strong-willed women who become bank robbers and seek revenge for the death of their fathers, the film may be an example of the strong female roles Hayek has aimed for throughout her career. As *Los Angeles Times* journalist, Reed Johnson noted in anticipation of the movie, however, it was still unclear whether or not the film would be any good. Yet it would "provide a venue for those who have yet to tire of the 'Salma or Penelope' debate." As one of the directors, Epsen Sandberg explained in the same article, "The great thing about this movie… is that you get them both."[60]

The sentiment could not be illustrated any more clearly than by the scene of the film that is most often described in reviews: Hayek and Cruz, clad in tight fitting western costumes, hover over an "unwilling" male victim who is tied to a bed as they take turns kissing him, passionately, in order to prove who can perform the better kiss. Despite Hayek's attempt to stay clear of "sexpot" roles, and despite having supposedly gained more control over her acting opportunities with the success of *Frida*, she was still willing to perform this male fantasy in a film that she and close friend, Penelope Cruz, finally stumbled upon after having "wanted to do a film together for

[60] Reed Johnson, "Movies; Double-barreled firepower," *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 2005, E1.

ages." Until *Bandidas*, they had simply not found the "right project."[61] As *Variety* reported about the film, Cruz and Hayek "gamely expose acres of cleavage, but even that may not be enough to lure buyers and renters."[62] The film was a box office failure and represents one of Hayek's most forgettable roles.

Where stars are generally made famous in connection with the well-developed roles they have played,[63] Christine Geraghty explains, "The term celebrity indicates someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having a lifestyle… Women are particularly likely to be seen as celebrities whose working life is of less interest and worth than their personal life."[64] Hayek has been able to capitalize on exactly this type of celebrity status, for although she has continued to act, she has been associated with numerous box office failures, many of which have remained under the radar of the general public.[65] So, although Hayek may occasionally receive positive reviews such as that which appeared in *Variety*, proclaiming her performance in *Ask the Dust* (2006) "strong and sensual,"[66] the films have remained relatively unknown to audiences. It is also notable that the characters, with few exceptions, remain highly sexualized. *Variety's* Todd McCarthy, for example, explains that in *Ask the Dust*, "Hayek's sexiness is so palpable" that it is difficult to imagine her love

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Joe Leydon, "Bandidas," *Variety*, January 15 – January 21, 2007, 35.

[63] Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes*, 6.

[64] Christine Geraghty, "Re-examining stardom: questions of texts, bodies, and performance," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.

[65] Also see *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000), and *Across the Universe* (Julie Taymor, 2007), for example.

[66] Todd McCarthy, "Ask the Dust," *Variety*, February 6 – February 12, 2006, 92.

interest "driving such a ripe and available opportunity away."[67] Jim McBride, CEO of Mr. Skin, which provides "revealing pictures and video clips" of actresses through their subscription website, explains, "I'm a guest on radio shows at least 300 times a year as the expert on celebrity nudity in film. If I'm on the radio talking about a movie like '*Ask* the *Dust*,' and telling guys, 'You've got to check it out: *Salma Hayek* has a full-frontal at the 33-minute mark,' it's going to make guys want to rent or buy the movie."[68] That is precisely what studios hope. However, as box office failures such as *Ask the Dust* prove, even that is sometimes not enough to gain the film an audience.

Having been a spokesperson for cosmetic companies such as Revlon and Avon, however, and gracing the covers of every magazine imaginable, Hayek is still a household name. Most recently, her marriage to French billionaire François-Henri Pinault, and the birth of their daughter, Valentina, has made her the subject of public fascination. As Williams explains, the "emphasis on the private sphere and the interaction with other forms of fame means that in the celebrity mode the films are relatively unimportant and the star can continue to command attention as a celebrity despite failures at the box office."[69]

Hayek has continued to produce and act not only in films, but also in the medium of television. As Williams notes, the time involved in producing a film is much greater than many other forms of media (television, magazines, and the internet, for example), and so actors in today's industry must engage with other forms of media in order to remain relevant. One of the most successful programs which Hayek and Ventanarosa produced is *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010), in

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Andrew Adam Newman, "Site That Bills Itself as a Movie Review Finds That Sex Sells," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2007, C5.

[69] Geraghty, "Re-examining stardom," 189.

which Hayek occasionally appeared (although she was by no means the star of the show). Hayek has successfully built an image of herself as a powerful force in the industry, both as a celebrity and as someone working behind the scenes. She has been successful in her attempts to construct herself as more than just a sexual object, and rather, as a woman of intelligence and agency. That agency, however, is more closely associated with her abilities as a filmmaker and producer, rather than her acting ability, despite her best efforts to establish both.

Salma Hayek, Producing

With regard to actresses like herself, who have been able to establish a certain amount of power in the Hollywood industry, Hayek says, "It's very important that we take responsibility and make a difference and try to explore ourselves not just as actresses, but to use our creativity and our talent to support other women…. other generations…. I think we have a lot to say and we have to find those stories and we have to support those stories and we have to tell them."[70] Through her production company, Ventanarosa, Hayek has supported both women, and Latinas/os, alike, while simultaneously providing herself with roles with more depth, both in front of and behind the camera. Ventanarosa titles made after *The Velocity of Gary* have all been Latina/o-themed, and include: *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1999), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001), *Frida* (2002), *The Maldonado Miracle* (2003), and the television series, *Ugly Betty (Frida* and *Ugly Betty* being the most critically and commercially successful of the bunch).

The Spanish/Mexican/French co-production, *No One Writes to the Colonel* was made in collaboration with Ventanarosa, directed by Arturo Ripstein, and based on the 1961 novella written by the Colombian Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel García Márquez. Hayek had a small role

[70] *Searching for Debra Winger*.

as a prostitute with a heart of gold. The roles Hayek played in the first two of Ventanarosa's productions did not provide her with exceptional opportunities to break free from the usual opportunities available to actresses in Hollywood. As Eli Bartra and John Mraz have noted, however, "As Salma Hayek has taken control of her cinematic career, she has shown a desire to place rebellious women at the center of the big screen."[71] For example, in the TV movie, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, which was made for the cable network, *Showtime*, Hayek plays Minerva Mirabal, one of the famous sisters murdered for their revolutionary activities, in opposition to the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. The film is based on the Julia Alvarez novel bearing the same name, a fictionalized account of real life events. It is notable not only that Hayek was an executive producer on a film based on the work of one of the most well respected Latina writers in the U.S., but also evident that she aimed to assist other Latina/o actors to secure substantive roles. Hayek had previously noted, for example, that she believed the Mexican actress, Lumi Cavasos, although more talented than she, has not achieved the same success that she has. It is likely Hayek facilitated the casting of Cavasos as Minerva's sister, Patria, in *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

Hayek and Ventanarosa's next film, *Frida*, is the film for which Hayek has received the most critical acclaim for both her acting and her abilities as a filmmaker, and it is the one about which she has expressed the most passion. Her "producer" title also indicates it was the film with which she was most directly involved as it is the only film for which she received a "produced by" credit.

Hayek first became interested in the life and art of Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo, as a teenager. Years later, when she starred as the lead in the Mexican telenovela, *Teresa*, she

[71] Eli Bartra and John Mraz, "Las Dos Fridas: History and Transcultural Identities," *Rethinking History* vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 450.

approached the producer, Lucy Orozco with an idea about a miniseries based on Kahlo's life, but there was no interest from the networks.[72] There were, however, several other filmmakers interested in making a film about Kahlo in the United States, soon after she arrived to the country. For example, Madonna, an avid collector and admirer of Kahlo's, had expressed interest in making a film in which she would star. Luis Valdez was working on a film entitled *Frida and Diego,* which would star Laura San Giacomo. The Hispanic community, however, protested the casting and Valdez was, thus, forced to delay the film. Jennifer López was also cast to play Kahlo, but that fell through, as well.

Hayek, who was, at this time, gaining notoriety in Hollywood, also received numerous scripts based on the artist's life. She first became attached to the "'Frida' project," which began at HBO, as an actress in 1994. In 1996 the project was acquired by Trimark. When Hayek feared the film was going to take a direction that would not allow it to live up to its potential, she expressed her desire to be a producer, if she was, indeed, going to star in the film. She explained to the studio, "'I just want to make sure it gets made right.' But they never imagined how involved I would be in the process."[73]

By 1998, the film had moved to Miramax and the script was completely reworked by Rodrigo Garcia, the son of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.[74] Hayek says it was once she found the right script and the right director that she was able to really make moves to get the film made. Hayek

[72] Rodriguez, "Salma: Living free, like Frida."

[73] Dana Calvo, "Feeling Frida's Pain; Determined to play the artist in a credible biopic, Salma Hayek signed on as a producer, seeing the film, finally in production, through troubled times," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2001, 1.

[74] Ibid.

had been "determined to hire a woman who was also an artist to direct Frida."[75] After settling on the script (which was finally credited to Clancy Sigal, Diane Lake, Gregory Nava, and Anna Thomas) she says, "It wasn't until I found a partner who saw the movie like I saw it that I felt ready to go, and that was Julie Taymor."[76]

Overall, approximately eight screenwriters worked on the script for *Frida* (although only four are listed in the credits of the film). Hayek's boyfriend at the time of the production, Edward Norton, is reported to have "tightened and clarified" the script, free of charge, when the budget no longer permitted additional rewrites. Miramax President Mark Gill claims Norton "transformed" the script,[77] although his efforts ultimately went uncredited in the film. It took three production deals, along with at least seven producers, six executive producers, and one co-producer, to complete the project.

As was the case with *Chasing Papi*, the production history of this film was a very complicated one that involved many people, different studios, executives, and creative people. *Frida*, however, unlike *Chasing Papi*, was a commercial and critical success. The discourse around the film would lead one to believe that it was Hayek's perseverance, her passion, and her connection to the material that made that possible. Hayek was attached to the project from the early stages of the project and she eventually became the driving force behind the film. Trade and press accounts reflect that Hayek chose filmmakers and actors who understood and shared her vision as it developed throughout the process. She secured rights to Kahlo's paintings, and was involved in numerous aspects of making the film. As explained by Geoffrey McNab in *The*

[75] James Adams, "'A lot of life to tell' Salma Hayek laboured for more than six years to bring Mexican painter and icon Frida Kahlo to the big screen. She talks to James Adams about breaking away from bombshell roles and realizing her dream film," *The Globe* (Canada), September 9, 2002, R1.

[76] Rodriguez, "Salma: Living free, like Frida."

[77] Calvo, "Feeling Frida's Pain."

Independent, "Frida would never have been made without Hayek."[78]

Even *Frida*, however, evidences Hayek's understanding and manipulation of Hollywood conventions and just how far she can push the limits when it comes to subversive images of Latinas in the mainstream. A biopic about the radical, bisexual, Mexican painter, Eli Bartra and John Mraz note that "the Frida of Taymor-Hayek is empowered through her sexual energy."[79] Many reviews commented on the fact that while Hayek attempted to replicate Kahlo's famous moustache and unibrow, the actress's beauty could not be hidden by costuming, making her an uncharacteristically glamorous Kahlo. The focus of the film is not so much Kahlo's life, but rather, the love story between the painter and her famous husband, painter Diego Rivera. Kahlo's bisexuality appears to serve as a response to Rivera's unfaithfulness and also as momentary titillation in brief scenes that depict Kahlo and her female lovers, although the presence of figures such as Kahlo's real life lover, Chavela Vargas, in the film, do provide opportunities for more subversive readings.

To return to Bartra and Mraz's analysis of the film, the scholars also note that "while the team of Taymor and Hayek is clearly attuned to the sexual politics of the 'real' Frida, they seem less attentive to her politics in general." Her "political commitment" is considered "derivative" of Rivera's and by emphasizing her personal success/gratification, they make "Kahlo into a prototypical bourgeois artiste, rather than depicting the courage and commitment of a dying leftist."[80] A beautifully made film that subverts many stereotypes of Latinas that have circulated in the mainstream for decades, *Frida* must be recognized as a negotiation between Hollywood

[78] Geoffrey McNab, "Salma Gets Serious," *The Independent* (London), February 24, 2003, 14-15.

[79] Eli Bartra and John Mraz, "Las Dos Fridas," 451.

[80] Ibid., 453.

conventions and subversive material being introduced by filmmakers interested in telling new, Latina-themed stories. Hayek negotiated the difficult terrain with great facility and the film was nominated for six academy awards, including one for best actress. Hayek did not win the Oscar for her performance, but the film did win in the categories of "Best Makeup" and "Best Original Score."

About her experience making *Frida,* Hayek has said when she was making the film, she thought, "'This is what I want to do. I want to do one movie that if I die the next day, I know I left one thing in this world that I was very proud of, that other people can see, that meant something to me, that had my voice.' Because God forbid I die tomorrow, I'm the bombshell for the rest of my existence."[81] As both an actor and producer, Hayek found satisfaction in at last expressing her creative voice. Having tired of being asked to play "dumb" characters, and being dismissed by directors she says during filming would ask her opinion of the script and then be "confused" when she would respond that the scripts had "a lot of problems," Hayek decided she would need to "create projects for [herself and] other Latin women."[82]

After making *Frida,* Hayek went on to direct the film, *The Maldonado Miracle*, which *Showtime*'s president of programming, Jeff Offsay, had offered the actress/producer the year before. Offsay had hoped to be the one to "discover" her directing talent,[83] but Hayek had initially declined. She says that although she had always had the desire to direct films, she "was

[81] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/7.

[82] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/6.

[83] James Endrst, "For Young Viewers; Faith, Hope and Jose," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2003, 55.

too much of a coward to admit it" to herself. Particularly because she had already struggled so hard to be taken seriously as an actress, she feared ridicule.[84]

As David Schwarz, the chief film curator at the American Museum of the Moving Image explains it, many of today's actors believe unless they direct they are simply "fulfilling someone else's vision." As journalist Rebecca Louie explains, "Often, from the point of view of the actor, that vision is impaired."[85] The belief has led to an increase in the number of actors who try their hand at directing. Studios often offer stars the creative freedom, hoping "that the onscreen reputation of a star will translate into hefty box-office receipts when he or she sits in the director's chair." Furthermore, as Fox Searchlight Films president Peter Rice has noted, the arrangements allow for excellent publicity opportunities.[86]

Hayek has, like many other actors, recognized producing as another way to secure creative control over her roles. Her commitment to creating more opportunities for other women in the industry, as well as for herself, combined with the inspiration she found working with *Frida*'s director, Julie Taymor, however, motivated her to accept the challenge of directing *The Maldonado Miracle*, despite the reservations she had about doing so. As she explained to the *Daily News*, "I got angry that there are not enough female directors out there. So I thought I was not going to be a chicken-- and I would take a chance. And I did it, and it was easy! They lie when they say it's difficult. They lie! It was joyful."[87] Hayek was an executive producer on the film, as well as the director, and she received positive responses to her work in the press and the

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[84] Rebecca Louie, "A Beautiful Mind at Work First-Time Director Salma Hayek Sets Out to Show Her Many Talents," *Daily News* (New York), January 7, 2003, 33.

[85] Rebecca Louie, "Artists Get In On the 'Action!' The Hottest New Job Description in Hollywood is Actor/Director," *Daily News* (New York), December 30, 2002, 29.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Louie, "A Beautiful Mind."

trades. *Variety*, for example, noted that the "deftly handled project bodes well for Hayek's future behind the camera."[88]

Hayek noted that she did feel excitement about the possibilities her efforts could open up for other women directors and explained, "As an actress, I feel so limited…. People think, 'Oh, she has an accent' or 'Oh, she looks like this or represents that.' There are so many things attached to an image. For me, directing was liberating because I got to tell a story with my internal voice, where my accent doesn't matter."[89] In fact, Hayek won the Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Directing in a Youth/Children/Family Special for her role in *The Maldonado Miracle*. Her directorial efforts, however, have thus far only included one additional music video for Prince's *Te Amo Corazón*, which was released in 2005. Hayek has since explained she has no intention of directing any other music videos[90] and she has yet to direct another feature film. She was, however, instrumental in the success of the television program, *Ugly Betty*, an adaptation of a popular Columbian telenovela, *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (1999-2001), which has also been adapted in numerous countries around the world, with great success.

When the project was considered for adaptation in the United States, the intent was to create a non-Latino comedy akin to *Ally McBeal*. After experiencing many setbacks between 2001 and 2004, the producer, Benjamin Silverman changed his strategy and decided to include several Latinas/os in the production team to create a show intended for mainstream audiences and the growing Hispanic population (much like *Chasing Papi*, which was the subject of the previous case study). Silverman hired what Juan Piñon calls "cultural translators," in order to bridge the

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[88] Dennis Harvey, "The Maldonado Miracle," *Variety*, February 3 – 9, 2003, 38.

[89] Louie, "Artists Get In On the "Action!"

[90] Juan Manuel Navarro, "Salma Hayek viene en plan de 'Bandida,'" *El periodico USA* (McAllen, TX), February 7, 2006.

gap between mainstream and Hispanic audiences, as well as between different generations,[91] executive producer Salma Hayek and screenwriter Silvio Horta being two of the most significant involved. Hayek and Horta were important to the project not because of their perceived "authenticity" as Latinos/as, but rather for the "commercial value of their hybrid subjectivities in the context of a commoditized multicultural media production for national and global consumption."[92] It was the "valuable ethnocultural capital"[93] that Latinas/os such as Hayek and Horta carried that were vital to the project. In addition, "Hayek's highly visible presence in the media and her production house Ventanarosa allowed a better positioning of the *Betty* project among the network executives' community, advertisers, and sponsors, as well as with the targeted audiences."[94]

In the fall of 2006, *Ugly Betty* was touted "the most watched new television show of the fall season, beating all other networks," and it was the program that received the highest overall ratings at ABC in eleven years.[95] Hayek's involvement with the show enabled its success, as well as that of the career of America Ferrera, who played the lead role and as a result, was propelled into the spotlight like never before. As Kerri Allen notes with regard to the significance of the accomplishment Hayek made with *Ugly Betty*, while it may not be that she had control over the

[91] Juan Piñón, "*Ugly Betty* and the Emergence of the Latina/o Producers as Cultural Translators," *Communication Theory* vol. 21, iss. 4 (November 2011), 394.

[92] Ibid., 407.

[93] Ibid., 394

[94] Ibid., 402.

[95] "Beautiful Ratings," *Hispanic*, November 2006, 12.

content of the program, Ventanarosa's bringing the project to ABC "signals something of a sea of change."[96]

And the Cycle(s) Continue…

The lead actor in *Ugly Betty*, America Ferrera, first gained attention as the protagonist of *Real Women Have Curves*. After the relative success of the film, she began to secure roles in television movies and series, as well as in films such as *How the Garcia Girls Spent Their Summer* (2005) and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005). It was not until *Ugly Betty*, however, in her role as the frumpy but loveable title character, that she came to the attention of mainstream audiences. As Silverman describes the show, *Ugly Betty* provokes "conversations about race, about class, about differences and distinctions within our everyday life. That's really what's driving us and I think you see it within the show."[97]

Like Ferrera's character, Ana, in *Real Women Have Curves*, Betty resists normative standards of beauty that permeate U.S. mass media. In 2007, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that considering her triumph over the much thinner Felicity Huffman, of *Desperate Housewives,* America Ferrera's winning the public's vote for best actress at the Golden Globes in January was an example of a shift in viewers' acceptance of fuller-figured women - a "genuine super-sizing."[98] With her increasing fame, however, came a shift in Ferrera's body weight, as well. By the end of 2008, almost two years later, *The Los Angeles Times* critic, Mary McNamara noted that America Ferrera had "lost so much weight it looks like they have to pad her to play her

[96] Kerri Allen, "Media, Democracy, and the Hispanic Factor," *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* vol. 17, iss. 14 (April 23, 2007): 30.

[97] Rob Salem, "Ugly Betty a proven charmer," *The Tornoto Star*, September 28, 2006, A26.

[98] Booth Moore, "Style Notebook; Does Size Really Matter?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2007, 3.

average-sized character on "Ugly Betty."[99] As she has become a bigger star, she has quite ironically, become physically smaller to conform more closely to the standards of beauty that the projects that catapulted her into the spotlight critiqued.

Like Hayek and other stars who are interested in pursuing roles about which they feel passionately, Ferrera has also begun to work behind the camera, as well as in front of it. She has, thus far, served as an executive producer on two feature films, *Hacia la oscuridad/Towards Darkness* (2007) and *The Dry Land* (2010), both of which are Latina/o-themed and in both of which she plays a starring role. She worked for several years on the first film and explains, that while she enjoys the ability to act as a translator of sorts, "as a producer, you have the power to actually shape a story and character, and that is so rewarding." She further explains with regard to other films, such as *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, in which she plays a starring role but does not act as a producer, she enjoys going "back and forth between the things that are fun, and the things that are important and fun."[100]

Conclusion

Avellán believes the most important thing she has done for Hayek over the course of her career is provide her with encouragement. Because she believed so strongly in Hayek 's potential, she provided her the emotional and financial support she needed to establish herself as a celebrity and gain a foothold in the industry. Hayek has since converted that power into producing power, which she has utilized to create more substantial roles for herself and other Latinas (and Latinos) in the industry. Like Ferrera, who notes she alternates between projects she

[99] Mary McNamara, "Critic's Notebook; They're showing a lot of skinny," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 2008, E1.

[100] Rebecca Ascher-Walsh, "America Ferrera faces a different 'Ugly,'" *The Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2008, E5.

feels are “important” and those which are simply “fun,” Hayek has similarly had to alternate between projects which take risks on new Latina/o stories and images, and playing less substantial, more stereotypical roles that have been more typical of her career. Having recently become a mother, Hayek’s image has also begun to change somewhat, and she has begun making family films such as *Grown Ups* (2010), *Puss in Boots* (2010) and *The Pirates! Land of Misfits* (2012), the latter two being animated films.

Most impressive, however, is Hayek’s ability to strike a balance between her passion projects and those that make sense for her career, while constructing an image of herself as a Hollywood star with both agency and sex appeal. After starring in the heavily promoted film, *Wild, Wild West* (1999), opposite Will Smith and Kevin Kline, Hayek told the London-based paper, *The Guardian*, that she had recently turned down a small part in a film, explaining: “I'm a big shot now, because I am in Wild Wild West and I have, like, 10 [magazine] covers coming out.”[101] *Wild Wild West*, however was not the success originally anticipated. Almost four years later, after the success of *Frida* and her directorial debut with *The Maldonado Miracle*, Hayek explained to *The Independent* (also based in London): "I'm self-sufficient. I can produce, I can direct, I can act…” Once again, proclaiming she had gained control over the roles from which she has to choose, she said, “I don't think I will do another Wild Wild West…” Giving herself a bit of room in the event she would likely accept another disappointing role, about which she might later shift her attitude (like she has regarding *Wild Wild West* and so many other films) she cleverly qualified her statement, saying, “But then, you don't know it's going to be Wild Wild West until you see it.’”[102]

[101] “I said, I’m a big shot now and I want a bigger part.”

[102] Geoffrey MacNab, “Salma Gets Serious.”

Although perhaps not always as in command of the types of roles she is offered as she might prefer to be, Hayek is most certainly very shrewd in terms of business and she is in command of her celebrity image. By manipulating that image, she is able to provide support to filmmakers and actors who are slowly changing the face of the industry. As she explains about her bombshell image, "I am grateful to the bombshell because if it hadn't gotten me where it had gotten me, I wouldn't be where I am today." Furthermore, she explains that although she had hoped that after the age of thirty-five she would be given the "good roles" because she was no longer young enough to play the bombshell, she now realizes that would never have happened. Instead, she explains:

> … as important as it is for the producers to pay more attention to female roles, it's more important for us to take control over this situation and define who we are. Because if they just give us the parts, it's their point of view of who we are. What's important is that we define who we are and don't wait for the men to give us the roles…. I've learned so much from having to figure out everything on my own and create things for myself. Now I can teach what I've learned to the next generation. I'm not just going to be the pretty face that disappears. I've learned how to produce, to direct, to write. I'm not disposable so easily anymore. When I am 60, I can keep directing. I have the potential to really, truly have a voice that makes a difference.[103]

Actors such as Ferrera are the next generation, and many will surely establish additional power as a result of the support Hayek has provided, much the way she established power as a result of support from producers like Avellán; and so the images of Latinas/os that are available in the mainstream continue to diversify, albeit slowly, sporadically, and perhaps in ambiguous ways.

As for Hayek's own future creative endeavors, she explained to *Redbook*'s Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez in 2006 that although she was already a producer at that time, she hoped to become a

[103] "Oprah Talks to Salma Hayek," *O, The Oprah Magazine* (September 2003), accessed August 2, 2012, http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/8 and http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Actress-and-Producer-Salma-Hayek/9.

"much better producer," to continue directing, and also to begin writing. She explained, "I want to be able to express something about me that later I can direct, and that I can have the absolute vision of what's in my head go through me, through the entire process, until I can touch it and smell it and see it."[104] Hayek echoes Robert Rodriguez and his belief that filling as many roles as possible in the filmmaking process increases a filmmaker's claims to authorship. Exactly how Hayek's creative process functions as a star-turned-producer, as well as how it would be transformed by filling additional roles in the production process, however, remains to be seen.

[104] "Salma Hayek: 'I Demand More Respect for Who Women Are,'" *Redbook* vol. 207, no. 5, Nov 1, 2006, 122.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Mollie Gregory has noted that women working in the film and television industry during the 1990s "had no real knowledge of any history of women in television or film, how comparatively new women were to the field, what kind of challenges women had surmounted, or how few women had produced films or TV series in the late 1970s compared to today. In short, they had no idea of their own history."[1] Although Latina filmmakers took about twenty years longer to enter the industry in any numbers, they have also begun to secure opportunities to create images of themselves that circulate in the mainstream media the way that their non-Latina counterparts have.

For the purposes of this study, I have limited my scope to Latina/o-themed films made by Latina filmmakers. This focus has allowed for a more complex understanding of the roles Latinas play in producing images for a media-saturated environment where women's bodies and Latino/a culture are regularly exploited for profit. This study has explored how Latinas are finding ways to benefit from the current climate to make room for themselves within the film industry and increasingly give voice to populations that have long been marginalized in the mainstream. At times, Latina filmmakers have contested the establishment from "outside" the system through their involvement in the creation of oppositional cinema. They have also increasingly gained opportunities to work "inside" the system to create a wide array of images that are sometimes stereotypical, sometimes subversive. So while the commodification of Latinidad has given rise to an increase in Latinas' representation behind the camera, which

[1] Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), xiii.

allows them opportunities for self-representation and community building, it is also severely implicated in the production of images that have the potential to perpetuate the subjugation of those same communities. This study has focused not on the positive or negative representations of Latinas that Latinas have had a hand in creating. Rather, it has focused on the circumstances that have informed the production of those images.

Expanding the Feminist Framework

As Lizzie Francke notes in her book-length study, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood*,[2] there are instances when the right producer or studio head, for example, might advocate for or impede a woman's idea from making it to the screen. Francke's work supports the idea that Latinas' contributions to feature film production can be illuminated through a multitude of different partnerships and/or collaborative efforts. Francke is clear that women writers by no means guarantee more "progressive" or "positive" images of women on-screen, and she encourages readers not to judge the worth of their work according to whether it is "progressive" or portrays a feminist bent.[3] Instead, she highlights the ways in which women have

[2] Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London: BFI, 1994). Francke's study of women screenwriters provides a socio-historical perspective on the significance of one of several underanalyzed roles within the film industry, and while I have attempted to refrain from duplicating her "celebratory" model of recuperating women's contributions to the film industry, her work has provided several insights which are crucial to my argument about collaboration and the synergistic nature of filmmaking, so crucial to understanding the work of Latinas in the U.S. film industry.

[3] Both Judith Mayne and Christina Lane similarly stress the importance of relaxing what often seem strict demands by feminist film scholars who require women's cinema be feminist in its aims. See, for example, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). Mayne asserts that even in its recent antiessentialist claims, feminist theory has failed to account for the multiplicity of possibilities that exist for women to participate in and view film. As she so eloquently states, "Ironically, the antiessentialist position assumes essentialism – the belief that there is a genuine female identity that has been repressed by patriarchy and which emerges through feminist practice – to be a position of noncontradiction" (p. 7). Also see Christina Lane, *Feminist Hollywood: From* Born in Flames *to* Point Break (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000). Lane claims that the films she analyzes in her study do not all espouse feminist ideals either. Rather, they enter what Lane, quoting Christine Gledhill, calls a "'feminist orbit,' making themselves accessible to feminist debates and critical readings" (p. 13). While it is clear that institutional sexism persists in the

navigated a system that seeks to exploit their talents to tap into female audiences, while simultaneously containing those ideas that threaten the male-dominated system and society within which they work. She rightly asserts that women are unfairly assigned the responsibility for improving the quality of films for their lot, as they are expected to somehow "know better" than to perpetuate stereotypes of women that have existed since the industry's inception. This assumption functions to absolve men of the same responsibilities simply because supposedly, they do not know any better. Women, Francke reminds readers, are also trying to survive in a male-dominated industry and negotiate difficult waters as they compete with men who do not bear the same burden of representation that women do.

This point has been crucial to my argument, as many of the films I have examined can be considered less than progressive when considered from a "feminist" and/or "Latina/o" perspective. Analysis of these images has been useful not in an evaluative sense, in terms of "positive" or "negative" roles that Latinas/os play on-screen. Rather, it has been significant because it has illuminated the types of negotiations Latinas have had to make in order to secure the power necessary to make their films. In the case of Josey Faz, that power was severely limited as the intent she and her filmmaking partners had was always to make films outside of the mainstream. She may not have approved of the depiction of women in the films on which she worked, but she was proud of the reality of Chicano life that she had a part in portraying, in ways that had not been done before. Working outside of the system provided tremendous freedom to Faz, Gutiérrez, and their filmmaking teams. The films, however, which communicated highly

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industry, Lane emphasizes that many women are able to play with narrative and generic conventions, and a diversity of spectator positions, special attention being paid to an audience of women exposed to second wave feminism, aware of the discourse of feminism and the construction of identity. She says this provides the possibility of feminist readings of seemingly non-feminist films. Lane challenges the idea that women's films should be evaluated according to feminist intent of the directors, considering that 1) what constitutes "feminism" shifts over time, 2) many women may resist the label of feminism due to the severe backlash against feminism in the United States, and 3) related to the second point, many women's relationship to feminism may change over time, as well.

controversial messages certainly gained Faz no interest from the mainstream film industry. As her interest in filmmaking was tied tightly to her family, once her partnership with Gutiérrez ended, the obstacles she faced in terms of the sexism she encountered from within the Chicano film community proved to be more than what she was willing to endure.

With regard to the remaining case studies that have been explored in this project, the representation of Latinas is significant because of the role that marketing prospects (both real and perceived) have played in Latina filmmakers' abilities to gain opportunities to work on mainstream feature films, as well as the ways the content and distribution strategies have developed once those opportunities have been secured. For example, Avellán has produced many action and family films that have a "Latin flavor," but lack strong political viewpoints.[4] In addition, many of those action films are notorious for their objectification of women and for being male-centered (which might be expected from films that fall within the genre). Avellán has evidenced sensitivity towards women that is absent from most of the films she has made with Rodriguez, and many of the films she has made independently from him evidence her interest in more politically and socially minded content. It is, however, because she established herself as a producing powerhouse through the action and family films with Rodriguez that she now has the ability to invest her own resources and energies and put the networks she has established to use on projects that do have more social and political implications for Latinas/os, women, and other marginalized populations in the U.S. and around the world. In the process, she has been able to support other Latina/o filmmakers and actors who have the potential to further impact the industry, Salma Hayek being one of the most notable examples.

[4] The film, *Machete* (2010), is one notable exception that provoked political debate over immigration issues, but it is significant to note that the film was made well into Rodriguez's and Avellán's careers, after they had established themselves as filmmakers with a substantial amount of power and resources.

Hayek, in turn, is an example of what Mary Beltrán notes with regard to the most visible of Latinas/os in Hollywood: "The burden of representation experienced by Latino and Latina stars can be seen as growing heavier as they represent an increasing population." Given that opportunities for Latinas/os to play complex lead roles remain scarce and despite the "Latin wave" of the 1990s, that burden is particularly complicated. For it is precisely Hayek's highly sexualized star persona and her manipulation of that image that has enabled her to establish the power she has in order to support films that depict powerful women who are more than just sexual objects, but who also challenge the status quo. While the expectations of the Hollywood industry and audiences may dictate that Hayek's image conform, to some extent, to established stereotypes of Latinas, like Avellán, once she established enough power she began creating additional opportunities for herself and other Latinas/os in the industry. And so the cycle continues.

Lastly, as the case of *Chasing Papi* has shown, in an environment where Latina/o culture is so highly commodified, the collective signature of Latinas on this film served as a significant means of marketing a Latina/o-themed product. Although it is still rare for Latinas to secure the opportunity to direct several features that might be considered their *oeuvre*, Latina authorship has become a selling point for studios interested in creating Latina/o-themed films targeted at Hispanics in the United States. *Chasing Papi* certainly does not fit neatly within the parameters of a feminist film project, as such, and in fact, in many respects, it conforms to the traditions of Hollywood cinema to which feminist theory (anti-essentialist or not) has generally been so opposed. However, as this study has shown, although the credits of the film would indicate the film is a product of largely Latina creative efforts, it was more heavily influenced by the studio's and non-Latina/o filmmakers' creative ideas about Latinidad. The film did, however, provide a

window of opportunity for Latinas in film and is another example of their entre into the mainstream.

Acquiring and Maintaining Creative Control

As this study (and the case study of *Chasing Papi*, in particular) has shown, it is not only the opportunity to make a feature film that is difficult for filmmakers to secure; in addition to obtaining an opportunity to exercise creative control, it is also maintaining creative control that can be a challenge. Certainly, one of the most significant challenges to filmmakers seeking access to the mainstream is finding someone in a position of power who is willing to take a risk on their talents. Once the opportunity is secured, however, a filmmaker's creative vision can be completely transformed, sometimes with and sometimes without his/her approval.

When attempting to gain access to the mainstream Hollywood film industry, studios and investors are ultimately interested in financial returns, which filmmakers cannot, of course, guarantee. Filmmakers who have something to offer, which might translate into box office returns, such as star power (Hayek), traditionally profitable genres (Avellán and Rodriguez, who furthermore minimize financial risks by keeping costs low), or stories that are considered marketable to particular demographics of interest (Simón and the case of *Chasing Papi)*, are most likely to succeed. This study indicates that it is Latinas who establish power through well-established patterns (such as being connected with a director or attaining star/celebrity status) and prove their products/images profitable on the industry's existing terms, who are, in turn, able to use that power to create images that deviate from existing representations of Latinas/os in film. Finding the initial opportunity to prove their films have the potential to generate profit,

however, continues to be one of the largest obstacles for new filmmakers seeking access to the mainstream.

Dealing with Multiple Currencies, Communities, and Creative Contributions

Although producers are, like the Hollywood industry, at large, generally thought of as being concerned only about the bottom line, they are valuable for much more than their facility with budgets. Producers deal in a variety of currencies, such as star power and ethnic identity, noted above. Different forms of currency have varying degrees of value to the communities with which producers deal, and in fact, the communities and networks to which producers have access are also different types of currency that are valuable, in and of themselves. For creating reliable networks and communities upon whom they can depend to make quality films is particularly important to Latina producers, who often work with smaller budgets and experience greater expectations than producers of other mainstream films.

In the case of Avellán, the importance she places on demonstrating sincerity, loyalty, and human connection is a currency all its own. Creating good will among her contacts has generated a community of talented individuals from which she draws, often at a moment's notice and for less compensation than might otherwise be expected. It encourages a collaborative environment and allows her to maintain increased amounts of creative freedom for her directors, who consequently experience minimal interference from the outside. The case of Avellán and Troublemaker Studios exemplifies the ways in which multiple communities, not just creative individuals, are involved in the making of feature films.

The creative vision of the director is, of course, very important to any film, but as this study has shown, there are also a variety of other types of creativity that shape feature films, including,

for example, the storytelling ability attributed to writers and the creative contributions of innumerable individuals who offer their ideas during many stages of the filmmaking process. Producers can be sources of creative ideas of many kinds and, in fact, in the case of this study, every producer at the heart of each chapter possesses talents that are traditionally recognized as creative (cinematography, editing, drawing, writing, and acting, for example). One of the creative talents most vital to producers, however, is their ability to recognize and support other talented individuals, whose work complements each another.

With regard to the ability of producers to recognize talent in others, Peter Biskind's, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, describes its significance in the recounting of a discussion that took place between Bob Rafelson (co-founder of Rabert Productions) and his future business partner, Bert Schneider, during the early 1960s. Rafelson explained to Schneider:

> The problem in moviemaking… is not that we don't have talented people… We don't have people with the talent to recognize talent… What this business needs is not better directors, but better *producers* who are willing to give directors with the ideas a chance to do films their own way. It's not just final cut, it's final *everything*.[5]

Avellán's efforts to assist in the creation of a female-owned company that funds producer-driven projects follows Rafelson's line of thinking. Producers who fully trust in the filmmakers they choose to support and who provide creative solutions to enable their creative visions have made significant contributions to the industry.[6] Rafelson's observation that producers who recognize and trust talent enough to support their visions, are key to the success of the film

[5] Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (NewYork: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1998), 52.

[6] Rafelson, for example, was the co-founder of Raybert Productions, one of the production companies behind *Easy Rider* (1969), which is touted as one of the most influential films of the late 1960s. The film marked a shift towards a period of tremendous creative production by filmmakers inspired by the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s, and enabled by the collapse of the Hollywood studio system.

industry is relevant not only to Latina directors who are emerging on the Hollywood scene, but to Latina filmmakers of all kinds. For as this study has shown, the artistic vision of a film can originate from a variety of sources: writers, producers, directors, or studio executives, for example. The vision can be influenced and manipulated by any number of individuals involved in the development, production, and post-production processes, and it changes over time. In this sense, it is not the director alone who should be credited with the creative shape that most films take, nor is it to any producer's or writer's credit alone. It is, however, the producer's task to recognize and communicate a single vision to all the individuals involved, as well as to bring together the most qualified people and resources necessary to execute one vision that remains consistent throughout the whole film. The ability to trust that they have assembled the most well-suited talent for the job and that all parties involved share the vision that the director ultimately has in the final stages of production and post-production is part of what makes for a successful producer and a successful film.

As the case of *Chasing Papi* has shown, when studio executives and producers, for example, interfere excessively with the creative process, the opportunity for the creative vision of the film to become clouded increases exponentially, making it difficult for true collaboration to take place. That is to say, producers' creative visions are vital to the filmmaking process, and their ability to recognize and guide other filmmakers' creativity so that their efforts come together as one, single vision is a skill. Their ability to create synergy by coordinating people and resources that will complement each other is unique. Their ability to envision and create the best possible scenario that will facilitate collaboration and the making of the best film possible is, likewise, vital to their success.

Making Room for New Voices to be Heard

Now, after approximately a century of creating images of Latinos with little attention to Latina/o audiences or Latina/o filmmakers, it is especially vital for the white, male-dominated industry to allow Latina/o filmmakers the freedom to explore their creative visions as they aim to tap into audiences for Latina/o-themed and –produced films. Particularly considering the industry's interest in tapping into the English-dominant Hispanic market, with little evidence indicating the types of material that audience may respond to, Latina/o filmmakers who are familiar with the culture(s) (in most cases, more so than the executives and producers with decision-making power) are key resources. If allowed to do their jobs with minimal interference, they may provide insight into the target market. As with filmmakers before them, however, it is to be expected that the process will take some experimentation until the filmmakers find a formula for success. Latina producers are key to this process.

While Latina filmmakers trail behind not only white women who began to make an entrance onto the scene during the 1970s and 80s, but also their male, Latino counterparts, who received a small increase in access to the mainstream film industry during the 1980s, it is notable that all aforementioned groups continue to be underrepresented both on-screen and behind the scenes. Although minorities of all kinds continue to struggle for equal access to the means of production, as well as equal on-screen representation, and they necessarily negotiate their artistic visions with the demands of an industry resistant to change, the industry is slowly changing shape (as well as gender and color). In particular, increasing numbers of women and people of color behind the scenes are presenting more opportunities for new stories to be told by new talent, and in new ways.

Although it is still an uphill battle, women no longer have to rely on men the way that Gregory describes women entering the male-dominated business during the 1970s and 80s; for as she explains, at the time, it was men who had to go "against all the usual hiring codes – work with the people you trust and have worked with before,"[7] in order to allow women a chance to make their mark. As more women become involved in the industry, they are increasingly proving to value women's stories and perspectives, and to support and trust in the talent of other women (Latinas included) who are seeking opportunities to make feature films.

Latina/o filmmakers with decision-making power have also been key to providing increased opportunities for Latinas both on-screen and behind the scenes. Given the cachet directors of feature films are granted, romantic partnerships have also enabled a significant number of opportunities for Latinas who additionally form professional partnerships with Latino directors. To be clear, this does not indicate that it was the directors who secured any particular power before allowing their partners to become involved with their artistic endeavors. As both the case of Faz and Avellán show, the romantic partners learned various aspects of the business together and facilitated each other's success. It was, however, in both cases, the directors who initially gained the attention and trust of individuals willing to take a risk on their talents that opened the doors for them, their producing partners then contributing hugely to their success, once those opportunities had been secured.

In addition to romantic/professional partnerships, Latinas are making their way into the industry in a variety of other ways, notable points of entry including the genre of romantic comedies, movies made for cable networks, and the conversion of star power into producing power. Comparably new to the industry, Latina filmmakers have had a relatively small

[7] Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*, 15.

community of experienced filmmakers and actors from which to draw so that as they gain access to the means of production, they are making use of their own networks of people they trust, hiring from within their own communities, some of those people with whom they have worked before and other newcomers with whom they have not. Producers such as Hayek and Avellán are building communities and networks to support new talent and they taking risks on new stories while providing creative solutions and mobilizing resources in ways that best service the films on which they work.

This study has only begun to address the role producers play in the process of creating the synergy necessary to make films. Whether or not stars-turned-producers function in ways similar to producers without celebrity status has yet to be discovered, for example. In addition, there are numerous roles that people play in the making of feature films, which have yet to be investigated in synergistic terms. Screenwriters, cinematographers, and a variety of positions below the line, for example, deserve analysis. There is also room for more in-depth textual analysis and considerations of aesthetic aspects of the films, Latina-themed and otherwise.

While this study has been limited to studies of Latina filmmakers involved in the making of Latina-themed films, it is important to note Latina filmmakers can also be found in the credits of numerous non-Latina/o-themed films. They contribute to a wide range of content for they are, of course, multifaceted individuals who are not necessarily interested in identity politics alone. They address themes other than those directly related to race or gender. For example, Rose Troche has directed, written, and produced a number non-Latina/o themed films (such as *Go Fish* (1994) and *The Safety of Objects* (2001)) and television programs (such as *The L Word* (2004-2009)). Celia D. Costas has co-produced/associate produced/executive produced films such as *Private Parts* (1997), *Zoolander* (2001), and *Closer* (2004), among others. Mariana

Sánchez de Antuñano has worked as an assistant camera on films like *Syriana* (2005) and *Domino* (2005), as well as several episodes of the television program *CSI: Miami* (2002-2012).

What this study has attempted to dispel is the myth that any one particular role in the filmmaking process is necessarily more vital than the other. Whether stars, directors, producers, writers, or studio executives, for example, everyone involved in the filmmaking process has an opportunity to make a distinct, creative contribution to a film. In some cases, one individual's contribution may be more influential than another, but every production is different and involves an unpredictable set of economic, industrial, social, historical, and economic factors that affect the location of creative control. Furthermore, film credits cannot be depended upon to determine the power dynamics among filmmakers, for titles do not always reflect the particular duties of the filmmakers attached to them, nor do they reflect the circumstances of any given film production. Authorship is synergistic and depends upon the specific combination of contributions, large and small. It is about the right people and things coming together at the right time. The whole is greater than sum of the individual components.

As this study has shown, Latina producers are contributing to synergistic authorship and in the process, they are increasingly negotiating a space not only for themselves, but also for other filmmakers (Latina and otherwise) who have historically been unable to gain access to the world of feature filmmaking. They are changing the way films are made while diversifying who it is that has the opportunity to make them. Although focused on Latina producers, this study hopes to stimulate a discussion about ways to reframe the notion of authorship that will benefit filmmakers of all kinds, from brown women working above the line to white men working below the line. It has the potential to increase the recognition of creative contributions of those who belong to underrepresented communities of many different kinds. In addition, reconceptualizing

the creative process of filmmaking as a social phenomenon affected by material circumstances and collaborative opportunities that involve complicated dynamics related to race, class, and gender, for example, rather than as a product of individuals who might be considered sources of creative vision, this study facilitates a more complex understanding of the gendered and cultural elements of film production cultures and the images they produce. The implications are significant with regard not only to individual filmmakers, but also with regard to the way entire populations that have generally been marginalized in a white, male dominated industry are understood. Similar to the Latina filmmakers at the heart of this study, the concept of synergistic authorship also has the potential to diversify film history.

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