CHAPTER NINE

JEWSH PUBERTY IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA: CONSTRUCTING JUDEO-LATINIDAD

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Translated from the Spanish by Amalia Ran

Introduction

The return to democratic regimes in Latin American societies during the 1980s was characterized by a new phenomenon: the presence of Jewish themes and protagonists in films that were distributed and exhibited in commercial circles. While this novelty may have been noticed at first almost exclusively in a few Argentine films produced after Pobre Mari- posa (“Poor Butterfly,” by the director Raúl de la Torre, 1986), it was to be rapidly multiplied in the following decade. Not long afterwards films from Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay were added to this growing list of works. It should be noted that it is not ethnic films made by Jews about Jewish topics, for Jewish audiences’ consumption, which I will be discussing here. Instead, it is about a new kind of representation of the Jewish experience in cinematographic texts: such representation allows any type of viewer to identify with the medium and with the inherent catharsis produced by pleasure and gratification, and without it cinematography would not have converted into one of the places of reinvention of collective identities and historic memory.

This new phenomenon is the center of scholarly attention from diverse perspectives. Ilene Goldman proposes analyzing simultaneously the process of national identification, the vicissitudes of cinematographic production, and the representation of Jewish experience, but she offers an analysis of a film created by a non-Jewish director that coincides only with her third point. Carolina Rocha studies the Jewish experience in documentary films and motion pictures directed by Jews in an ethnocentric prism, yet not an essentialist one.1 Theresa

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Alfaro-Velcamp compares the image of Arab and Jewish immigrants in two Mexican films and concludes that *mexicanidad* is a dynamic and flexible concept, and deduces further that Mexico is essentially a multicultural nation. Alfaro-Velcamp’s article puts forth a vision that accommodates the state’s ideological hegemony, whilst the Zapatista movement called on marginalized and oppressed groups to fight for the rights of the original peoples of the land and their descendants. In this way Mexican multiculturalism is revealed much less flexible than suggested by the author. At the same time, Nora Glickman points out that the abundant exhibition of Jewish rites and customs in a recent Mexican-American coproduction is a product of syncretism, incorporating comparisons with Gentile habits and associated with the conjugation of Fantastic Realism’s motifs with Jewish Kabbalistic and mystical ones. On the other hand, Inara de Amorim Rosas and Luis Antonio Mousinho emphasize the respect for alterity in one of Sao Paulo’s neighborhoods inhabited by Jewish, Italian, Greek, Arab, and Brazilian immigrants.

Continuing this brief survey of scholarly commentary, we may note that Gonzalo Aguilar comments in regard to the so-called New Argentine Cinema and maintains that these movies represent the decomposition and dysfunctionality of the institution of the family, while in the narratives of Jews the family serves as a reference for a stable world in which reunification is possible and meaningful. They thus indicate a Jewish posture toward the family experience, such as Marshall Berman has proposed. Finally, Tamara Falicov adds that the Jewish experience is represented in New Argentine Cinema movies from a previously unexplored juvenile standpoint, in search for new answers to old dilemmas, such as preserving traditions, facing exogamic marriages,

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