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Carolina Rocha

JEWISH CINEMATIC SELF- REPRESENTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE AND BRAZILIAN FILMS

*In recent years, young Latin American-Jewish film directors have produced films that portray the Jewish communities in both Argentina and Brazil. While Argentine-Jewish filmmakers have been prominent since the beginning of the film industry in Argentina, it is the first time a group of contemporary directors share the depiction of Jewish life and culture. For his part, Brazilian-Jewish director Cao Hamburger also chooses to present the Jewish community of São Paulo in his award-nominated film, *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* [The year my parents went on vacation (2007)]. This article explores what this self-representation entails for Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish filmmakers, as well as on the commonalities of Jewish characters presented in the films of Daniel Burman, Gabriel Lichtmann, Ariel Winograd and Cao Hamburger.*

Introduction

Jewish producers, scriptwriters, directors and actors have always actively participated in the national cinemas of both Argentina and Brazil since its inception at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1919 Max Glücksmann (1875–1946), a Polish-Jewish immigrant, built a theatre called El Ateneo Grand Splendid, in Buenos Aires, which 10 years later, became a cinema that screened the first sound films. Glücksmann not only opened movie theatres but was also in charge of a news programme, *Actualidades*, and was a pioneer in documentary filmmaking. Decades later, Luis Saslavsky (1903–1995), a prominent Argentine-Jewish director during the studio era, took part in more than 30 films between the years 1931 to 1979. His contemporary León Klimosky (1906–1996), although trained as a dentist, founded the cineclub, directed several films in Argentina, and later made commercial films in Spain. In Brazil, León Hirszman (1937–1987), who belonged to the Cinema Novo generation, directed *Eles não usam black tie* [They don't wear black tie (1981)], a film that received wide domestic and international critical attention. In addition to these directors, the list of Jewish producers, actors and scriptwriters is quite remarkable considering the relatively small percentage of the Jews in Argentina and Brazil.¹

However, the last 15 years have witnessed a heightened interest in the depiction of Jewish characters and Jewish life in these countries by Argentine and Brazilian filmmakers.² For example, in Argentina in 1996 Eduardo Mignona directed *Sol de otoño* [Autumn

sun], a comedy with a cast composed mainly of non-Jewish actors. Indeed, the central character, Clara Goldstein (Norma Leandro), who is Jewish, leads a carefully structured life that is disrupted by her brother's announcement of an imminent visit. Trying to impress him, Clara sets out to find herself a Jewish boyfriend, but only non-Jewish men answer her advertisement. Thus, Clara, whose Jewishness is kept secret, has to train one of her suitors to be Jewish. *Sol de otoño* makes it clear that Jewishness can be performed by using certain words and emphasizing certain customs.³ The film, intended for a general audience, did relatively well at the box office and received several awards.⁴ In 1998, another non-Jewish director, Daniel Barone, directed *Cohen versus Rossi*, a light comedy about an Italian and a Jewish family from Buenos Aires who quarrel and later reconcile. *Cohen versus Rossi*, which had a cast of both Jewish and non-Jewish actors to represent Jewish characters,⁵ enjoyed an excellent box office success. Three years later, Barone and Antonio Ottone released *Un amor en Moisesville* [A love in Moisesville] with a non-Jewish actor in the leading male role, but with the Argentine-Jewish actress Cipe Lincovsky in the leading female role.

These examples from Argentina can be compared with recent developments in Brazilian cinema, which have centred on the persecution faced by Jews in both Portugal and Brazil. In 1996, Jom Tob Azulay directed *O Judeu* [The Jew], a film that focused on the plight of the eighteenth-century Brazilian-born intellectual Antônio José da Silva (1705–1739) who was burned at the stake by the Portuguese Inquisition. In 2004, Jayme Monjardim directed *Olga*, a historical docudrama based on the life of Olga Benário Prestes (personified by non-Jewish actress Camila Morgado), a Jewish communist militant who was deported to Germany because of her political involvement in Brazilian politics during the late 1930s and, as a result, died in a concentration camp. In 2005, João Batista de Andrade made *Vlado trinta anos depois* [Vlado thirty years later (2005)], a documentary based on the life of Vladimir Herzog, a Jewish journalist, professor and filmmaker. Because of his militancy in the Communist Party, Herzog died in 1975 while being interrogated by members of the Brazilian intelligence agency in charge of suppressing dissident activities. While it is certainly worth exploring the triggers for these recent cinematic representations of Jewish characters and victims by non-Jewish filmmakers, the purpose of my article is to examine another equally interesting phenomenon: the cinematic self-representation of Jewish life and characters, that is to say, the representations recently directed by contemporary Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish filmmakers who portray Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish characters. This is the first time in the national cinemas of Argentina and Brazil that Argentine-Jewish and a Brazilian-Jewish filmmakers have turned the camera on Argentine- and Brazilian-Jewish characters to capture their challenges and experiences in the diaspora.

Contemporary Argentine- and Brazilian-Jewish filmmakers

My analysis includes a group of young filmmakers, the oldest being Brazilian Cao Hamburger, born in 1962; Argentine Daniel Burman, born in 1972; Gabriel Lichtmann, born in 1974; and Ariel Winograd, born in 1977. Besides their similar age, these filmmakers have all directed films during the last 10 years, a fact that renders them members

of the same generation. Burman's *Esperando al Mesías* [Waiting for the Messiah] was released in 2001, *El abrazo partido* [The lost embrace] in 2004 and *Derecho de familia* [Family law] in 2006. Gabriel Lichtmann's first feature-length film *Judíos en el espacio* [Jews in space] and Ariel Winograd's *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto* [Cheese head: My first ghetto] were both premiered in 2006, and Cao Hamburger's *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* [The year my parents went on vacation] was released in 2007.

In addition to having released films in the 2001–2007 period, these filmmakers share other similarities. They are part of the second or third generation of Jewish immigrants. Because they were born in Latin America, they have not experienced the immigration process, as their forebears have done. Consequently, there are almost no descriptions of the first stages of immigration, the culture shock or the process of assimilation. In addition, these filmmakers are also urbanites, born and raised either in Buenos Aires or São Paulo and therefore in contact with Latin America's most sizeable Jewish communities. Third, they have reached a high level of education, completing post-secondary education: Lichtmann and Winograd studied film and Burman studied law and audiovisual media production.⁶ Nonetheless, these filmmakers share their depiction of contemporary Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish life, and their success in something that transcends the Jewish community and has broader implications for the study of ethnic minority groups in Latin America, which is what I call a process of de-hiding or making minority groups visible to a larger audience.⁷ This process of de-hiding takes the form of illustrating certain rituals of Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish culture that have previously scarcely been touched upon in cinematic representations. In other words, for the first time Jewish filmmakers are screening Jewish characters and recording Jewish life in Argentina and Brazil.

This process of de-hiding entails incorporating words in different languages and exhibiting customs that are not widespread in either Argentina or Brazil to mainstream audiences. Indeed, older characters use Yiddish in the films by Lichtmann and Hamburger, a rare feature if we consider that Goldman cites *Pobre mariposa* [Poor butterfly (Raúl de la Torre, 1986)] as one of the few mainstream films in which a Jewish character is identified by her use of this language. *Pobre mariposa* is more an exception than a rule in previous cinematic representations of Jewish characters. However, the use of Yiddish in *Pobre mariposa* and in these recent films underscores the fact that the majority of Jewish characters depicted are descendants of Ashkenazi Jews who migrated in large numbers to both Argentina and Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, klezmer is also introduced in *El abrazo partido*. In addition, Jewish characters are shown holding a seder in *Judíos en el espacio*, celebrating bar-mitzvahs in *Esperando al Mesías* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, and also attending funerals that follow the Jewish tradition in *Derecho de familia* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*. The fact that Jewish religious rites and ceremonies are portrayed indicates a desire to represent Jewish characters as faithfully as possible for a non-Jewish audience.⁸

In creating and recording images of Jewish practices in contemporary Latin America, these filmmakers not only stress Jewish specificity but also compose a corpus of visual representations about how Jewishness has been, and is, lived and performed in Argentina and Brazil over a period of four decades—from the early 1970s of *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* to the most recent (2007) *Derecho de familia*. For film scholar Tzvi Tal, this depiction of Jewish urban life appears disconnected from the past and institutional Jewish life, and thus distorts the traditional Jewish concern with memory.⁹

That is to say, these films centre on a diegetic present without representing or problematizing history. However, the existence of this corpus is by itself a remarkable step in the process of making visible a minority community that now occupies a place on the screen. Moreover, this corpus provides an opportunity for Jewish filmmakers to represent themselves without the mediation or biases that non-Jewish directors may deploy in their films.

Despite the variety of genres and stories presented by these Latin-Jewish American filmmakers, the films by Burman, Hamburger, Lichtmann and Winograd show Jewish characters in the cities of Buenos Aires and São Paulo, a fact that may stress their acceptance and integration. Far from being represented in the provinces or marginal areas, their location and representation in centres of finance and culture Argentina and Brazil stress their significant participation in national life. However, these characters are rarely seen as isolated from the Jewish community, a strategy that may also help to minimize the issue of assimilation. In other words, while the Jewishness of these characters may appear to be diluted due to their lack of proficiency in Yiddish and their almost entirely secular lives, the fact that they are shown as members of the Jewish secular community reinforces their belonging to this group. Argentine Jews maintain certain traditions and socialize in Jewish clubs and schools without necessarily having strong bonds with Jewish institutions, a fact that gives them a sense of belonging to their group.

Whether situated in Once or Villa Crespo, two neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires where many Argentine Jews reside, or the neighbourhood of Bom Retiro in São Paulo, popular among immigrants in Brazil, the Jewish characters presented in these films are always part of a close-knit family and a larger Ashkenazi community. Both these groups provide a link to the past and a sense of fitting into the wider Latin-American societies.

These films also have *bildung* in common, in order to present a Jewish male at a time of his life when a crucial negotiation takes place between tradition and everyday life in predominantly Catholic countries. Julia Kushigian notes that the function of the *Bildungsroman* is to chronicle the coming of age, as it “describes/inscribes those people who ‘come of age’ and develop regardless of where they started, at what point they finish, and what outcomes may be”.¹⁰ This is the case in Burman’s films, where the main protagonists are Ariel Goldstein in *Esperando al Mesías*, Ariel Makaroff in *El abrazo partido* and Ariel Perelman in *Derecho de familia*, all played by Uruguayan-Jewish actor Daniel Hendler. These Jewish characters all experience a process of negotiation between their inherited Jewishness and the modelling of their Jewish identity in contemporary times. They do so in different ways. In *Esperando al Mesías* and *El abrazo partido*, the Ariel characters face the dilemma of remaining in the “ghetto” (as the Jewish neighbourhood in Once is called) and following in their fathers’ footsteps and becoming businessmen, or attempting different professions outside the predictable life in the protected environment of Jewish business. Another factor that influences the decisions of these characters is their grappling with what it means to be a Jewish Argentine. That is to say, they seek to balance their identity as Argentine Jews in relation to the identity of older members of the Jewish community and, in the process, they emerge with a synthesis of both cultures. As a result, the Ariel in *Esperando al Mesías* and the Ariel in *El abrazo partido* display the tension between a form of Jewishness that is acceptable for an older generation and a process of seeking meaningful models as members of a twentieth-century diaspora group. In the end, they embrace

Jewishness by continuing to live in the Jewish neighbourhood, and Argentine identity when they distance themselves from their Jewish girlfriends in favour of other women, not all of whom are Jewish.

While presenting the same issue of negotiating a Jewish identity in the diaspora, the *bildung* of Ariel Perelman in *Derecho de familia* yields a different outcome. In this film, perhaps the most autobiographical of Burman's productions, Ariel is a lawyer like his father, a fact that may point to the continuation of a family tradition. However, when the father dies, the filial link with the past seems to disappear, and Ariel, like Burman himself, married to a non-Jew, chooses to live a primarily secular life and focuses more on parenting than on upholding Jewish traditions. The family law or legacy is subtly reworked to focus on the relationship of a young father with his son. The inherited Jewishness of this character becomes a more spiritual and less evident trait.¹¹ Indeed, within a multicultural society, Burman seems to be questioning the validity of emphasizing minority belonging.

The process of development and formation is also evident in *Judíos en el espacio*, *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*. The male Jewish protagonists are, at the same time, members and observers of the dynamics of their Jewish families and the Jewish community as a whole. Lichtmann's *Judíos en el espacio* revolves around Santiago (Fernando Rubio), who is an observer of his family's strengths and weaknesses. Involved in finding his own place in the world and fighting his shyness, Santiago is propelled by his cousin Luciana (Luna Paiva) to reconnect with his Jewish family. The occasion could not have been more appropriate, as their Jewish grandfather (Axel Anderson) has lost his will to live and his daughters have been estranged for years. At Luciana's initiative, Santiago agrees to celebrate a *seder*, an event that allows the entire family to come together as in the past and settle old disputes that have contributed to its dispersion. *Judíos en el espacio* does not intend to propose grandiose solutions to the status of Argentine Jews. Rather, it presents the way in which a family can unite by celebrating its traditions and honouring its elders, disregarding the misunderstandings that have disrupted its unity.

The process of formation in *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto* revolves around the summer experiences of a Jewish adolescent. In Winograd's film, the character of Ariel (Sebastian Montagna) is an alter ego of the director. The film is set in a summer in the early 1990s. Ariel witnesses the abuse of a friend in the seemingly controlled and protected environment of the gated community of the Jewish country club. As a witness, Ariel faces peer, parental and societal pressure to alter his testimony about this incident. Thus, Ariel confronts the dilemma of yielding to the demands of others or acquiring his own voice. Presented as a comedy, *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto* deals with important issues, such as compliance and resistance, and belonging and exclusion. These fundamental issues faced by everyone in their process of development are, nonetheless, presented in a film where Jewish characters are often satirized. The self-deprecating kind of humour that American film scholars David Desser and Lester Friedman have identified in films made by Jewish-American directors is used by Winograd to attract Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike.¹²

In *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, the plotline focuses on Mauro (Michel Joelsas), who is similar in age and upbringing (he has a Jewish father) to director Cao Hamburger. When his parents need to evade the authorities, Mauro is left under the supervision of his grandfather, but the old man passes away minutes before Mauro

arrives. Mauro's process of development entails not only adapting to strangers—his grandfather's neighbours—but also coming into contact with Jewish rites and traditions for the first time. In the absence of a nuclear family, Mauro is unofficially adopted first by Shlomo (Germano Haiut) and later by the Jewish and non-Jewish community of Bom Retiro. The process is far from being an easy one, as at the beginning Mauro resists wearing a *kippah* at his grandfather's funeral, and plays with his caretaker's *talit*. While in Shlomo's care, he is called Moises, a name he strongly rejects, though he does become interested in learning about this biblical figure. As the film progresses, he becomes less resistant to Jewish religiosity and experiences other facets of Jewish life, such as a bar-mitzvah, which he comes to appreciate.

The use of *Bildung* may also be related to cinematic exposure (or lack thereof) of these young directors. In the case of Lichtmann and Winograd, their Jewish films are also their first feature films. In a conversation I had in with Gabriel Lichtmann in July 2007, he pointed out that writers (he also wrote the script of *Judíos en el espacio*) and filmmakers tend to resort to what they in order know to create their films; in his case, what he knows first-hand is the Jewish community in which he grew up. This certainly seems to be the case with *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto*, in which not only does the male protagonist share the same name with the director, but the plot is set when Winograd was a teenager like Ariel. In Burman's case, his trilogy of Jewish films is not his first production as director. However, because his previous films—*Un crisantemo estalla en cinco esquinas* [A chrysanthemum bursts in Cinco esquinas (1998)] and *Todas las azafatas van al cielo* [All stewardesses go to Heaven (2002)]—have been largely ignored by the public, his Jewish trilogy represents his “trademark”.¹³ Moreover, discussing *Esperando al Mesías* and *El abrazo partido* in an interview with film scholar Tamara Falicov, Burman explained his motivation for making films focusing on Argentine Jews. He states: “I feel like making these films and I continue to make them as a way to reflect upon *my* search for identity”.¹⁴ Thus, Burman's cinematography seems to follow the *bildung* trajectory through which characters and directors strive for personal development. Indeed, critics have recognized that the Ariels, the various protagonists of his trilogy, are Burman's alter egos. For *El abrazo partido*, Burman collaborated with Argentine-Jewish writer Marcelo Birmajer. In an interview with Birmajer in 2007, he indicated to me that certain scenes in *El abrazo partido* are based on his own life, as in a scene in which Ariel's mother recalls an incident from Ariel's childhood. Moreover, the character of Ariel's grandmother is modelled on that of Birmajer's own grandmother.

The insertion of autobiographical material is also evident in the work of Cao Hamburger, a successful producer of a television program for children, which resulted in a popular film, *Castelo Ra-Tim Bum* (1995). Not only did *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* mark his debut as director of a feature film, but the script was based on his childhood memories. According to Scarlett Cheng, Hamburger relied heavily on his experiences:

In several key ways, Mauro's story mirrors Hamburger's own experiences growing up in Brazil. He was passionate about soccer and, perhaps more profoundly, was the product of a multicultural environment—his father was a German Jew and his mother an Italian Catholic; both taught physics at the University of São Paulo—and he was directly affected by the turbulent politics of the day. “I remember that period like this,” Hamburger, 45, begins. “When my parents went on vacation—when my

parents were arrested—it was so mysterious, it's a mysterious age in my mind. They weren't dissidents, but they helped people".¹⁵

The search for his family roots was the concern of another project as well. *Variety* reported that Hamburger was involved in raising funds to finance a television documentary about members of his family who owned property in Germany.¹⁶

The presentation of the Jewish community is inextricably linked with the shaping of these filmmakers' own personal identities. In *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, as in *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto*, the constitution of a Jewish identity is related to the memories of a past in which the protagonist grappled with issues of belonging and difference. The development of the main character's individual identity is also realized within the larger scenario of a close-knit Jewish community that acts as a strong and decisive point of influence for his development.

The main characters in all these films act both as members and observers of their Jewish communities. This double view seems to combine intimate close-ups with medium-distance shots to provide different takes on the Jewish community. While as members of Jewish communities, the leading male characters participate in traditional celebrations and rituals, as observers they caricature certain traits of contemporary Argentine-Jewish and Brazilian-Jewish life, like competing to attract the best rabbi, or exhibiting the neurosis of Jewish mothers, simultaneously lovable and overbearing. The deployment of this technique is closely related to the use of humour in these films. Indeed, all of these are light comedies in which serious topics, such as economic crises, political persecution or the breakup of family cohesiveness, are downplayed by the use of Jewish humour. However, my interpretation differs from Albert Memmi's assertion that "Jewish humour tells of the fundamental lack of adaptation of the Jew to non-Jewish society",¹⁵ because the humour presented in these films seeks to create a bond with a non-Jewish society by exhibiting the contradictions and traits of a minority group in a non-threatening way. If, for example, the audience laughs at Santiago's stage fright during the performance and reenactment of a play about the diaspora, do they react to the plight of a Jewish boy or to a situation to which everyone is able to relate? The same logic seems to apply for the older Jewish characters who are stubborn, melancholic or set in their ways. These Jewish filmmakers appear to invite viewers to decide on the extent of Jewishness in the scenes that make us laugh.

All these films present the insider's point of view on the Jewish characters, a fact that humanizes a community that in many films has been represented by the stereotypes that film scholar Omer Bartov lists in *The Jew in Cinema*. Bartov classifies Jewish characters as perpetrators, victims, heroes and anti-heroes.¹⁶ Just as Bartov bases his classification of Jewish characters on a survey of American and European films, in a recent article regarding stereotypes in Latin American newspapers, José C. Moya also identifies stereotypes to represent Jews when he states that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were often imaged through the stereotypes of greedy capitalists and anti-capitalist radicals.¹⁹ *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, set in the turbulent 1970s in Brazil, briefly shows Mauro's father fleeing the control of the repressive Brazilian forces, perhaps as a result of opposition to capitalism and fascism, and *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto* revolves around four teenage boys who are more interested in asserting their identities *vis-à-vis* those of their parents than in amassing large fortunes. With the exception of these two films, all the other films by the Jewish filmmakers

studied here not only transcend those previous stereotypes used to represent Jewish characters, but also, and more importantly, present Jewish characters as affected by the same socioeconomic variables as the majority of the population. Indeed, avoiding polarizing portrayals of avaricious Jewish businessmen and violent Jewish reformers, what is evident is the middle-class status of the Jewish characters.

The middle-class status of the characters in the films by Burman, Hamburger, Lichtmann and Winograd constitutes a symbol of the integration of Jewish characters into the national cultures of Argentina and Brazil. Stressing their mainstream status may also be a technique used to appeal to middle-class audiences. Tzvi Tal asserts that in general, these films “interpelan al público con narrativas de la clase media urbana acongojada por la subsistencia económica y los conflictos familiares” [address the public with narratives pertaining to the urban middle-class overwhelmed by economic survival and family conflicts].²⁰ Indeed, what these films seem to stress is the similar fate of both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens in times of economic crisis. For example, in *Esperando al Mesías* Ariel is forced to look for a job independent of his father’s business because sales and consumption have fallen abruptly in the year 2000 and the family business is no longer as profitable as it used to be. The same is true in *El abrazo partido*, where a traditional shopping mall, a *galería* [arcade], is struggling to remain in business amid decreased sales and subsequent bankruptcies. In *Derecho de familia*, Ariel Perelman declines to join his father in his law office and prefers to work for the state and teach at a public university, perhaps the most obvious symbols of integration into the national state and middle-class status. The Rubin family of *Judíos en el espacio* owns a jewellery store that has also been affected by the economic downturn. As the three sisters in this film debate what to do with this family business, the protagonist, Santiago, has chosen an independent career path as a chef in a restaurant. The exception to an impoverished middle class is the Argentine-Jewish family of *Cara de queso: Mi primer ghetto*. They enjoy a good standard of living that allows them to vacation in a gated country club, a novelty in the 1990s. However, this seemingly protected life is simultaneously represented and criticized:²¹ Miguel Frías, the reviewer for *Clarín*, notes that the homogenization of life in the country club is shown as “un mundo adulto que promete ser asfixiante, intolerante, injusto” [an adult world that promises to be asphyxiating, intolerant, unjust].²¹ The enclosed setting of the country club that may be perceived as privileged is shown to be suffocating.

When politics is mentioned, as is the case in *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, the focus is not on the victimization or persecution of Jews alone. Political events affect Jewish characters and other Brazilians alike. The allusion to divisive politics in Hamburger’s film is minimal because the emphasis lies in showing the integration of various communities (Italian, Greek, Jewish) as they mingle in the neighbourhood of Bom Retiro. For instance, when police forces take over the university and imprison dissidents, the ethnicity of those who are repressed are never clearly shown, so that the focus is on the oppression of all Brazilians, independent of their background. Furthermore, *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* stresses an idyllic representation of Brazilianness, shaped on the country’s success as a World Cup champion.

If stereotypes are absent from these films, so are portrayals that represent Jewish characters as victims of either antisemitism or discrimination. Elsewhere I have discussed the fact that Burman’s *Esperando al Mesías* and *El abrazo partido* not only depict Jewish characters, but also include other immigrants who inhabit Once, such as Koreans, Bolivians

and Italians. They constitute a multi-ethnic mosaic of which Jews constitute a part, a fact that demonstrates tolerance and integration.²² The same impulse towards amalgamation appears in *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, where the *paulistano* neighbourhood of Bom Retiro is home to Italian and Greek immigrants, as well as to a gifted black soccer player whom the protagonist, Mauro, seeks to emulate. In representing multi-ethnic communities, these Jewish filmmakers seem to agree with Jeffrey Lesser and Ranaan Rein's views that there are other diaspora communities: "Jews, of course, have no monopoly on the Diaspora, and the relationship between national- and immigrant-originated ethnic identity is not unique to Jews".²³ Hence, there is a subtle attempt to relate the diaspora origin of Jewish characters to the fact that both Argentina and Brazil have been societies open to multiple immigrant groups since the nineteenth century.

The careful emphasis on being inclusive and representing a variety of national and ethnic groups within Argentine and Brazilian societies exhibited by these films stresses the level of integration the Jewish characters have achieved within these countries. In the past, Argentine and Brazilian Jews endured accusations of dual loyalty that were used as a means to discriminate against them and display the xenophobia of nationalist groups.²⁴ Thus matters that are cautiously avoided in the majority of these films are present-day politics and references to the state of Israel, the latter due to the filmmakers' fear of being considered disloyal to their countries.²⁵

The only film that alludes to Israel is *El abrazo partido*; but its insertion into the plot corresponds to the personal plight of the protagonist. Elías Makaroff (Jorge D'Elia), Ariel's father, lives in Israel. At first, the official reason for his leaving for Israel is his desire to participate in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. However, as part of Ariel's process of development, he discovers that his father has left as a result of the breakdown of his marriage. Facing his wife's infidelity, Elías chooses to self-exile himself, but nonetheless, he fulfils his parental obligations by calling his family in Argentina monthly and sending financial support to his sons. Another characteristic that presents this character as positive is his evident physical disability, that is, the loss of his arm. The fact that he has been disabled further demystifies the years he spent in Israel, as his own body bears the marks of the violence experienced in the Middle East. However, this sensitive topic is handled carefully. Far from being a victim of either his failed marriage or his life choices, this character conveys a sense of balance and inner fortitude, displayed for the benefit of his still immature son, who seeks a father figure to guide him.

To conclude, these films constitute the first cinematic corpus in which Jewish characters are presented by a group of young Jewish filmmakers in Latin America. This is a significant innovation if we consider that Argentine and Brazilian Jews have always been involved in filmmaking, yet they have seldom represented members of the Jewish communities in their films. The most noticeable among contemporary Argentine-Jewish filmmakers whose films pay lip service to ethnic concerns is the late Fabián Bielinsky (1959–2006). Before his unexpected death, Bielinsky directed *Nueve reinas* [Nine queens (2000)] and *El aura* [The aura (2005)], both well received by international and domestic audiences. With the exception of a secondary character named Sandler in *Nueve reinas*, neither film portrays Jewish life in Argentina. My purpose in mentioning Bielinsky is to emphasize that the Jewish filmmakers studied here have taken the road less travelled when, with less experience and fewer contacts than commercial filmmakers enjoy, they have chosen to represent Jewish characters. In doing so, they have made visible the diversity of issues facing Jews in Argentina and Brazil, but also, and more

importantly, they have highlighted a community that has scarcely been represented before in the national cinemas of Argentina and Brazil. In addition, these filmmakers are challenging narrowly defined concepts of what it means to be Argentine, Brazilian and Jewish by also depicting members of a variety of ethnic communities in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. While the plots of these films vary, there are certainly points in common, such as the construction of Jewish identity in the diaspora communities of Argentina and Brazil, particularly centred around male protagonists, and the reliance on *bildung*.

If my analysis has dealt with what has been represented on the screen, it is also worthwhile to comment briefly on the filmmakers themselves. Their middle-class background, training in film schools and access to both national credit and international financial support gives them an indisputable and privileged vantage point from which to put these films together. Burman, Hamburger, Lichtmann and Winograd are the visible representatives of a larger group of Jewish filmmakers that have not focused on the life of their Jewish community, such as Martín Rejtman, Ana Katz, Rodrigo Moreno, Diego Lerman, Damián Szifron, Daniel Burak, and many others. What is also significant is the fact that these filmmakers did not have domestic models or forerunners. The exploration of the filmmakers who have inspired them certainly constitutes an area for future research.

Even as the existence of this corpus denotes a concern about the status and construction of the identity of Argentine-Brazilian Jews, it has not exhausted the themes and characters that can be represented vis-à-vis this community. For instance, Orthodox Jews have not yet been depicted in these films, despite their visible presence in Buenos Aires. Although many Jewish women are featured in the films I have analysed, they all take secondary roles. A female Jewish *bildung* would certainly complement these films that portray the male process of formation. Finally, the representation of Sephardi Jews, also present in both countries, though in fewer numbers, would also enhance and expand the ideas that mainstream audiences have about the Jewish community.

Notes

1. According to the American Jewish Year Book quoted by Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, as of 2005 the Jewish population of Argentina reached 185,000, out of a total population of 37.9 million, Argentine Jews constituting 0.5% of the total population. In Brazil there were 96,700 Jews in a total population of 179,100,000 Brazilian Jews representing 0.05% of the total population (Lesser and Rein 6–7).
2. I have used the term “Argentine and Brazilian filmmakers” to refer to those who are not themselves Jewish. Film critic Tzvi Tal does not make this distinction between films by Jewish and non-Jewish filmmakers (see Tal 430).
3. As Ilene Goldman asserts, “ultimately, the presentation and representation of Jewishness in *Sol de otoño* [Autumn sun] confirm the flux of identity of a Diasporic culture within a metropolis populated by immigrants and wanderers”.
4. It received five Silver Condors (the most prestigious Argentine film awards) for Best Actress, Best Actor, Best Cinematography, Best Film and Best Director. It also garnered several international awards: a Goya (Spain) as the Best Film in the Spanish Language, a Best Actress award at the Havana Film Festival, an honourable mention at the Oslo Festival, and two awards at the San Sebastian Film Festival.

5. It was the second most viewed Argentine film, and was ranked eighth among the 10 most popular films seen in Argentina in 1998.
6. Tal 425.
7. Even though both Brazil and Argentina have accepted numerous and diverse immigrants, only recently have films begun to explore this topic. For a large part of the twentieth century, and due to the prevailing ideas of nationalism and national loyalties, immigrants and ethnic minorities were not widely represented.
8. In Omer Bartov's study, *The Jew in Cinema*, Jewish traditions and rites are absent in the many Eastern European and American films analysed.
9. Tal 427.
10. Kushigian 15.
11. As Ty Burr, the reviewer for the *Boston Globe*, has noted (2006), "[*Derecho de familia*] also touches on the issue of ethnicity and its disappearance in modern culture".
12. Desser and Friedman assert that "self-deprecating and self-ironic Jewish humor has been a constant companion of a people forced to live under someone else's rules, often-unwelcome inhabitants of someone else's religious state" (14).
13. According to the DEISICA of 1998, *Un crisantemo estalla en cinco esquinas* [A chrysanthemum bursts in Cincoesquinas] was seen by 3,288 viewers. Although there is no precise information regarding *Todas las azafatas van al cielo* [All stewardesses go to Heaven], it is not listed among the 10 most popular Argentine films of 2002 (information provided in DEISICA 12), which listed *Bolivia* (2002) by Adrián Caetano in the tenth place with over 50,000 viewers.
14. Falicov 136 (my emphasis).
15. Cheng, Scarlett.
16. Cajueiro.
17. Memmi, quoted in Desser and Friedman (13).
18. Bartov.
19. Moya 55.
20. Tal 430.
21. Frias.
22. See Rocha's "The Many Faces of Buenos Aires".
23. Lesser and Rein 25.
24. See Rein.
25. Rein 51–71.

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