

ARGENTINE CULTURAL IDENTITY PROCESS IN THE CINEMA OF DANIEL BURMAN

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Abstract

The following article is reviewing the aspect of cultural identity presented in the cinematic work of Argentine director Daniel S. Burman. Commented filmography is concentrated on El Once Trilogy (Waiting for the Messiah, 2000, Lost embrace, 2004, and Law of the family, 2006), its main character – Ariel, and various manifestations of specific notions of Argentine identity process. The cultural identity is re-elaborated on the screen and that is how it can be analyzed as an example image of contemporary Argentine identity, a nation of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. As we can notice, the identification discourse in the trilogy reveals fluid and process-like character of identities in contemporary societies.

Key-words: Argentine cultural-national identity; Argentine contemporary cinema; Jewish community in Argentina

Visual anthropology claims that audio-visual arts can describe human beings. Indeed, the cinema and feature films though being a creational reality can reveal to the audience the truth about man. Obviously, through its translation means. 'As such, fictional feature film (...) can also act as a guide to cultural construction of everyday life, to symbolic and metaphoric communication, and to political and economic forces.'¹ Cinema is able to reflect the process of identity construction as well. As a matter of the fact the beginning of visual anthropology can be traced back into the study of images associated with religious manifestations and personal identity². The image itself can be considered as a symbol which represents and redefines the process of identification in cultural, ethnic, local or national context. In this sense, it constantly creates and recreates meanings and senses. The main purpose of this paper is to analyze how the process of identity construction is depicted through the evolution of the main character in Daniel S. Burman's El Once trilogy: *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*, 2000), *El abrazo partido* (*Lost embrace*, 2004), and *Derecho de familia* (*Law of the family*, 2006). The objectives are to emphasize the notion of processual character of constant negotiation of cultural identity and to exemplify the construction of modern Argentine identity by the descendant of Jewish migrants. Burman is showing to the spectator one of the possible cinematic worlds, and this can serve to understand socio-cultural reality of contemporary Argentina. I use the term cultural identity because I consider it to be more appropriate as regards investigation of identity issues, especially within Latin American context. What's more, this term to some extent includes the meaning of ethnic, religious or national identity that all sometimes carry on political implications.

As commented on by Carolina Rocha, the past 15 years of Latin American cinema have lavished much attention to the depiction of Jewish culture and community, especially in Argentina and Brazil³. One of the key figures representing this tendency within Argentine cinema is Daniel S. Burman, a director often associated with *nuevo cine argentino* (new Argentine cinema). To be more precise, he is connected with the cinematic movement that was later named Generation'90s, to differentiate it from previous movement of new cinema – Generation'60s. Since he had begun his film career, his filmography has changed profoundly and today it should be rather depicted as auteurist cinema. Beyond labels, what is more important is that Burman's cinema reveals the cultural background in which his art is created and is capable of describing the specific part of reality with its people and their doubts. The authenticity of the portrayed world is what characterized previous renewal movement in Argentine cinema – Generation'60s. A wave that had crucial impact on contemporary new cinema and to which it is often compared, even though there are certain differences between

1 G. Gray *Cinema A Visual Anthropology*, Oxford and New York, BERG, 2010, p. XI.

2 E. Ardèvol and N. Muntanola, (eds.) *Representación y cultura audiovisual en la sociedad contemporánea*, Barcelona, UOC, 2004, p. 25.

3 C. Rocha 'Jewish Cinematic Self- Representations in Contemporary Argentine and Brazilian Films', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2010, p. 37.

those two film manifestations⁴. Owing to this kind of audio-visual representations, in the cinematic art we can experience fragmentary construction of a world that has its source in socio-cultural Argentine reality. Daniel Burman first appeared in Argentine cinematography in 1995, when INCAA (The National Institute of Cinema and Audio-visual Arts) held the first edition of *Historias breves (Short stories)*. Director soon became an emblematic figure of contemporary Argentine cinema; one for whom Jewish culture forms a rich source of reference. Jewish themes are important and distinguish especially the first period of director's work. The most recognizable of Burman's cinematic art is *El Once Trilogy*, which includes the three feature films *Waiting for the Messiah* (2000), *Lost embrace* (2004), and *Law of the family* (2006). Interestingly, in the later films of Daniel Burman we can observe a shift marked by the abandonment of Jewish references. As it is stated in the article of Natália Pianza, Burman himself explained this change by being tired of comparison to Jewish community's director and constant verification of the authenticity of the Jewish religious and cultural issues shown in his movies⁵. Although, *El Once Trilogy* can function here as a sociological statement as spectators' reception reconsider the border between a creative movie and social-cultural document that in its phenomenological aesthetics presents life of a particular group in a specific reality.

All of three movies are set in El Once district, a characteristic *barrio* (neighborhood) of Buenos Aires that gives a name to the trilogy, it is known for being a traditional district of Jewish community in the capital of Argentina. In each part of a trilogy the main hero is a character named Ariel, played by Daniel Hendler, Jewish Uruguayan actor whose face and voice became a symbol of Burman's movies. What would be the main goal of this article is to prove that in these three movies, spectator can observe the process of construction of identity on its various levels. Through the trilogy, unified by the figure of main protagonist, it can be observed that identity, understood as personal, cultural, ethnic or national parallel, is in a constant and subjective process of negotiation and creation of meanings. The subjectivity of Ariel is a fluid structure and cannot be discerned as a persistent state. Contemporary cultural studies after the 'postmodern turn' has started to consider identity as a process. This process is a method that characterizes social and cultural identification dynamics (Barker 2000, Bauman 2004, Giddens 1991, Geertz 2000, Hall and du Gay 2003)⁶. For all mentioned authors change and reflexive reference to wider socio-cultural context form the crucial element of contemporary approach to identities.

4 For more information refer to: S. Díaz 'La construcción de la marginalidad en el cine argentino: la generación del 60 y el cine de los 90', in A. L. Lusnich (ed.) *Civilización y barbarie en el cine argentino y latinoamericano*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Biblos, 2005.

5 N. Pinazza 'Diaspora and National Identity in Daniel Burman's *El abrazo partido*', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 21:3, 2012, p. 438.

6 Ch. Barker *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, SAGE Publications, 2000; Z. Bauman *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Cambridge, 2004; A. Giddens *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity, 1991; C. Geertz *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, Basic Books, 2000; S. Hall and P. du Gay *Cuestiones de identidad cultural*, Buenos Aires, Amorrortu Editores, 2003.

To summarise the trilogy, in *Waiting for the Messiah*, the main character is Ariel Goldstein, an adolescent Jew, whose life is shown in the middle of economic crisis in Argentina. Ariel lives with his father and both have to face a death of Ariel's mother and economic crash that leaves them without any savings. As a consequence the main protagonist is forced to search for a job outside the family business and that leads him to interaction with non-Jewish world that strengthen his doubts and identity crisis. In the second movie, *Lost embrace*, Ariel Makaroff is a young man, a Jew in Argentina who wants to emigrate from his country; here economic crisis is also present in the background of the film plot. Due to the economic situation, the main character wants to leave to Europe, taking advantage of the origin of his ancestors; his grandmother's Polish passport to be precise. Meanwhile, he helps his mother to run their family shop in *galería* in the district of El Once. Not much is known about his father who had left years ago to Israel to fight in the Yom Kippur war, though he is always present in Ariel's thoughts. Yet, in the third movie, *Law of the family*, doctor Ariel Perelman is a teacher at university and a lawyer, working for the justice department and representing clients *in absentia*. The spectator gets to know him when he decides to marry his former student Sandra, a Pilates trainer. After two years they are married and have a son, Ariel here plays a role of young husband and father. However, what is important in the last movie of the trilogy is that for the first time there is no Jewish community background. We will not find there any of cultural doubts concerning Jewishness known from two previous parts, the main protagonist here is rather torn apart by establishing his personal identity in reference to his father figure.

Throughout the trilogy Jewish references are numerous and various, obviously mostly in *Waiting for the Messiah* and in *Lost embrace*. As in the last movie director rather presents the reality of judicial world. In *Waiting for the Messiah* as the example of Jewish rituals and celebrations at the very beginning Ariel explains the *bar mitzvah* – a ritual of coming of age for boys when they become 13 years old. Then the scenes of Jewish funeral (*kevura*) and bereavement in *Waiting for the Messiah* and *Law of the family*. In *Waiting for the Messiah* we can also observe the ceremony of eight days and night's Hanukkah. In *Lost embrace* in interjected video scene Ariel is recalling in flashback his circumcision – the ceremony of *brit milah*. There is also reference to Jewish divorce – a *get* is a religious document of divorce that is exchanged between husband and wife allowing them to remarry in the future. Burman is also using other symbols and sources of Jewish identity. As an example of distinctive cuisine, in *Lost embrace* there is a symbolic Jewish honey cake – *lekach* (*leikach*). It represents the culinary tradition of Ashkenazi Jews and usually is eaten on Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year. Throughout the movies of the trilogy sound track is composed of Jewish traditional *klezmer* music playing from the off-frame. *Klezmer* is a term that refers to the music tradition of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern and Central Europe. Burman is also using this symbolic pattern of identity, particularly in *Lost embrace*, where Ariel's mother and her boyfriend – Marcos attend dance encounters in the Teatro Hebraico. Dance in Jewish culture is used to express joy, purity and social and cultural values; among Ashkenazic Jews it was always characteristic feature of the weddings. And for the centuries it was very

important and community unifying medium of identity. Those reference set one of the identity dimensions for the main character of Burman's trilogy, however they function as counter-arguments in modern identity discourse. Apparently most of them in the trilogy reveal the true attitude of Ariel to Jewish heritage, thus as such 'static' references to cultural identity they are no longer valid for contemporary generations living in multicultural world. Being in a quest for subjectivity also means renegotiation of traditional and orthodox identity components.

The analysis of space concepts in the trilogy of Daniel Burman can also reveal thought-provoking aspects referring to the cultural identity. As Marcos Pérez explains: 'Definitely, it costs much to encounter in the Argentine cinema works that don't enclose it's narration in the mimetic organization of space or, at least, in the recognizable construction of places where it occurs. It is hard to encounter Argentine movies that are apart from this tradition of putting the territory (the geographical characteristics and political circumstances that are supposed by this territory) as the background.'⁷ In the trilogy of Daniel Burman we can observe such symbolic image of space. Argentina – frankly speaking only the capital of Buenos Aires – is greatly cosmopolitan. It would be useful to observe here that the dichotomy between urban and rural sphere is crucial for analyzing not only geographical, but as well cultural and social world of Argentina. Buenos Aires is a central image of Argentina and the peripheries construct second and totally different vision of the country. Burman is presenting the reality of urban Jewish community, which is completely different than the reality of Jewish migrants that settled in the Argentine provinces of Entre Ríos, Santa Fe or even in the province of Buenos Aires.

The three movies of Burman share the name of El Once Trilogy and the Jewish district certainly is the major spatial reference, especially in the first and second film. As a matter of a fact, Once, being a part of *Balvanera*, is not an official *barrio*, though it is so specific that everyone tends to treat it as an separate district. Once is the zone nearby Avenida Corrientes and Avenida Pueyrredón. This common name of the neighborhood is derived from the Estación Once de Septiembre – 11th September Station. In the beginnings of XXth century *barrio* (especially the zone around Avenida Corrientes) became a centre of Jewish community in Argentine capital. The presence of Jewish culture and religion was observed in the appearance of synagogues and Jewish culture clubs; for instance such cultural institution as AMIA is situated there. The zone is known for a textile market that was originally run by Jews, however it is also famous as a place of tango culture and that would be the sign of its Argentine character. El Once is genuinely immigrants' district, apart from the Jewish community there are several other cultural and ethnic groups. And yet it still possesses its *porteño*⁸ identity. This specific *barrio* is a place where we can observe the process of construction of Argentine identity, where elements derived from varied cultural backgrounds

7 M. A. Pérez Llahí 'La posibilidad de un territorio En torno a una acotada renovación especial en el cine argentino', in: M. J. Moore and P. Wolkowicz (eds.) *Cines al margen, Nuevos modos de representación en el cine argentino contemporáneo*, Buenos Aires, Librería. 2007.

8 *Porteño* – inhabitant of Buenos Aires.

are melting and contributing into new composite quality. Eliahu Toker, an Argentine poet born in Once district, says this place is just as much *porteño* as it is Jewish. That would reflect it actually Argentine character apart of the fact that many different cultural and ethnic groups live there. Daniel Burman was also raised up in Once district and one of his less popular movies is the documentary entitled *Siete días en el Once* (*Seven days in Once*, 2001) about everyday life and history of the Jewish district. Director's childhood area is present in his movies and in that sense his movies are autobiographical. Daniel Burman acknowledges that el Once that he has idea of is actually very different from the today's reality of *barrio*. He says: 'The idea of Once that I have is a literary idea and this is not today's Once'.⁹ The emotional topology of the Buenos Aires Jewish district is best expressed by the German term *Heimat* and its corresponding literal, symbolic and emotional meaning which is without a discrete equivalent in English. As Alexandra Ludewig explains it by the words of Eric Rentschler: 'To contemplate *Heimat* means to imagine an uncontaminated space, a realm of innocence and immediacy'.¹⁰ *Heimat*, apart of being real place with geographic and cultural boundaries, is an idealistic place revived and kept alive mainly with memories and reminiscences. A place that is somehow lost forever and that is the bitter aspect of this childhood memory. It is the whole *imaginarium* that comes along with mental image of that place and with an intensive emotional charge attached to the meaning.

Apart of such symbolic reference to *Heimat*, Burman is also presenting an Argentine micro-cosmos as the multi-cultural space. In *Lost embrace*, most of all scenes are taking place in the *galería* – a shopping mall. The spectator can experience how the group of multi-ethnic provenience set its own hierarchy and how they learn to coexist on the same territory. There is a specific tolerance among group members, but unquestionably there is also certain social order to be respected. Mariela Coudannes comments on this in her article, in *Lost embrace* during several scenes it is expressed as 'the belief that in Argentina the discrimination and racism do not exist, that peculiarities of immigrants' groups are tolerated. (...) "La Babel", the name of nearby shoe shop, is turned into an effective metaphor of that coexistence'.¹¹ Throughout the film there are several commentaries that reflect stereotypes functioning in *la galería*, referring to Italians or Koreans. There is also a character of Ramón, a friend of family who is apparently of Andean origin and what we can notice in all movies is that he usually assumes subordinate roles within social hierarchy. El Once and *la galería* can be understood here as representations of multi-cultural Buenos Aires. As it is presented in the film there is indeed no racism among many ethnic groups that form this social reality. Apart of a few ironic statements that can be considered as 'not harmful', the community lives respecting each other and tolerating sometimes annoying habits. Ethnic discourse is often

9 'Que fue de tu vida', interview with Daniel Burman made by Felipe Pigna in TV Pública Argentina, [online video], 2010, <http://www.tvpublica.com.ar/tvpublica/articulo?id=4182>, (accessed 6 May 2013).

10 A. Ludewig 'Home Meets Heimat', *M/C Journal*, No. 10. 4, 2007, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/12-ludewig.php>, (accessed 9 May 2013).

¹¹ M. Coudannes 'Convivencia cultural y retornos familiares: una imagen no conflictiva de la Argentina en crisis', *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, Vol.17, N°2, 2006, p. 134.

based on the struggle against the hegemon, but in the movies of Daniel Burman it doesn't exist and the only racist is the 'Anti-semitic bee' of Joseph – Ariel's brother. This ironic tone underlines that director doesn't present the ethnic or religious minority understood as dominated group; Jewish community in the trilogy doesn't have to face any acts of racism. In the movies of Burman there are no accusations or denunciations, the focus is centered on the individual characters and their personal dilemmas.

Identity is a ceaseless process in which meanings are constructed endlessly, the signification constantly appears and reappears in the negotiation. This statement allows analyzing identity as a process, not a permanent construct that once fixed is preserved and accepted by individuals. *El Once* trilogy reflects that kind of approach to identity. All three movies of Daniel Burman present the identification inquiries and doubts of main protagonist – Ariel and through all of the films there can be drawn a specific process that preserves continuity. The spectator can observe different stages of identity dilemmas in each of the movies, that different stages constitute identity process. What describes Ariel best in all parts of the trilogy is the identity crisis, although the nature and form of the crisis are specific for each of three alter egos of the main character.

In *Waiting for the Messiah* the dilemma of Ariel is outlined between the boundaries of cultural-religious identity, which would be the ethnic identity of Jewish minority - *Jewishness* and national identity, which would be the dominant in the society Argentine identity – *Argentinidad*.¹² His trouble is how to reconcile being a Jew and participating without any restrictions in major group that forms Argentine society. For Ariel Goldstein those values are opposed, there is a scene in which he explains to Estela what he feels and by those statements his attitude towards being a Jew and living within Jewish community can be understood. Ariel says 'And living in this bubble [*burbuja*] forever. (...) I do not know, I want to see ... I want to see what happens... there, out there'. The main protagonist is using the word *burbuja*, meaning bubble, to describe his religious and cultural group. As if it would be a kind of an invisible cage that encloses and isolates a man. Ariel expresses his desire to know the world outside, to make decisions on his own and not depending on *plan de maravilla*. The marvelous plan, as he says about his future that was prepared for him long time ago. Burman himself once said 'I understood that Jewish identity lives in this tension, lives in the constant tension between what Jewish we want and what Jewish we do not want (...) and there is no dichotomy, there is tension.'¹³ Ariel seems to be personification of this tension, for him being a Jew is a constant pressure of who he is and who he wants to be.

In *Lost embrace* there is a different approach to identity questions that Ariel is passing through. In contrast to the first part of the trilogy, the conflict between being a Jew and being an Argentine is even wider. Adding to the former dilemma another aspect – of being

¹² Both terms: *Jewishness* and *Argentinidad* are derived from the article: I. S. Goldman 'To be(come) Jewish and Argentine: Cinematic Views of Changing Nation', *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, Vol. 10, N°2, 1999.

¹³ 'Presentation of the book *Pensar lo judío en la Argentina del siglo XXI* during the International Book Fair in Buenos Aires on 23 April 2011', [online video], 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ol7R3OVvefA>, (accessed 4 May 2013)

descendant of European migrants. The second movie is a kind of reconstruction of Ariel's identity, oscillating amid being a Jew, being an Argentine and being an offspring of Polish immigrants. Ariel's grandmother escaped from Poland because of the Nazi terror. For her Poland, despite of being a place of childhood, is above all a symbol of oppression. Breaking up with the past is revealed in the scene in which the grandmother wants to burn her passport. Nevertheless, for Ariel Poland is an opportunity, since it is situated in Europe and only that makes this land more promising than contemporary Argentina. For Ariel his ancestors' identity is bureaucratized and reduced to a few questions asked by the embassy's immigration officer. Another issue mentioned in this very meaningful scene is when the main protagonist is asked about his surname and being an Israelite. And he responds 'No, no, no. In fact not all Jews are Israelites. Israelite is related directly to Israel. So ... my father is Argentine, he moved to Israel so he can have some Israelite tendency, but not really.' Neither Poland, nor Israel is a fatherland for the main protagonist. The connection with Poland is absolutely artificial; it is revealed perfectly in the same conversation at the embassy, when Ariel lists prominent Polish figures. He is in fact reading the names from the notes that he had taken previously investigating the subject on the Internet. It is a comical scene when the main protagonist says 'I really like Roman Polanski. (...) Polański. He is the one that had an affair with a girl'. The only thing that he remembers about the well-known Polish-French director is his infamous incident with minor girl. His attitude shown during dialogue in the embassy reveals to the spectator the real feelings for the country of his ancestors' origin. For Ariel Poland means just Europe, several times in the movie the characters that are discussing the issue of emigration are referring to Europe as a continent, not to particular countries. Poland, for the main protagonist, doesn't mean anything, apart from being just better reality that Ariel wants to live in.

The absence of Israel in identity discourse that is lead by Ariel in all three movies is proving another aspect of his cultural and national identity. Israel is only somewhat present in *Lost embrace* where the character of Ariel's father leaves Argentina as it is explained at the beginning to fight in the Yom Kippur war¹⁴, although later it is revealed that the main reason of his departure was infidelity of Ariel's mother. Therefore, even that patriotic aspect is eventually invalidated. In the article *Diaspora and National Identity in Daniel Burman's El Abrazo Partido* Natália Pianzza is describing movie of Burman as an example of diaspora identity. Most of the comments on the Burman's film as an example of diaspora filmmaking are fair, especially the issue concerning the authenticity problem that actually led the director to the abandonment of Jewish content in his films. However, for one reason this comparison can be reconsidered. One of the key elements of diaspora is the memory and in case of Jewish diaspora above all it is the memory of space, the Promised Land that today would be modern state of Israel and the territory of Palestine. Neither in *Waiting for the Messiah*, nor in *Lost embrace* are there many references to Israel, which is surprising bearing in mind the specific role of the space in Jewish religion and culture. According to the Torah the land was

¹⁴ Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War was an armed conflict between Israel and the coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria, the war lasted from 6 to 25 October of 1973.

promised to the chosen nation from the God himself. This geographical area is known in Hebrew as *Eretz Yisrael*, meaning the Land of Israel, and for Jews living in the diaspora this phrase carry above all identification and religious meanings. As Tzvi Tal says in the article about contemporary Argentine cinema that describes Jewish community: 'Memory was characterized as a traditional way of life that has been devastated by modern rationalism'¹⁵. And within this memory of all members of diaspora commemoration of the history and the shared memory of the Promised Land is crucial; both are absent in the trilogy of Burman. The modern rationalism adopted by the next generations of Jews is symbolized by Ariel's superficial explanations of some central elements of Jewish traditions and in some scenes his lack of understanding of Judaism. In that sense Jewish references function in the whole trilogy as a marker to underline the difference of modern identity of following generations of migrants.

In the trilogy of Burman any sort of Promised Land is absolutely absent in direct or indirect mentions, in *Lost embrace* Ariel even pronounces his surprise when his mother says that he can go to Israel to *kibbutz* to live with his father. In the consequence it can be questioned if cinema of Burman is diaspora filmmaking, he represents rather dilemmas of the second generation of migrants. He was born already in Buenos Aires and shares an experience of greater part of Argentine population that has its ancestors' roots abroad. As Natália Piazza cites in her article Hafmud Naficy book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*: 'Like the exiles, people in diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity. (...) As a result, the nurturing of a collective memory, often of an idealised homeland, is constitutive of the diasporic identity.'¹⁶ For Ariel and for Burman that homeland is the district of El Once; Piazza is also stating this in a previous paragraph. El Once is considered in the trilogy as a representation of Jewish space, but there is no mention of the country of exile, memory of which forms integral part of the diaspora experience. In fact Jewish district symbolizes the connection with Argentina and the process of identity construction in which the country of La Plata plays central role as identity reference. No identity can be confirmed when detached from a territory and in the trilogy of Burman it is El Once district that functions as this space of recognition.

In the last movie of the trilogy identity discourse is changing completely. In *Law of the family* there is no cultural, ethnic or national identity dilemma that would bother main protagonist. Ariel Perelman is rather facing the problems and crisis of his personal identity with reference to his father figure. Even the beginning of the movie starts with the description of Ariel's father and only after proceeds to describe the main protagonist. In this identity construction, Doctor Perelman senior is playing the role of an antagonist of Doctor Perelman junior. What deserves commentary here is that Ariel Perelman is of a Jewish descent, but his

¹⁵ T. Tal 'Migración y memoria: la reconstrucción de la identidad de judíos y palestinos en películas recientes de Chile y Argentina', in: R. Rein (ed.) *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica, Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*, Sevilla, Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2008, p.419.

¹⁶ Pinazza, p. 441.

wife Sandra is not a Jew, that is to say a problem of intermarriage doesn't exist. A dilemma of Ariel Goldstein from *Waiting for the Messiah* is resolved here; a Jew can marry a person who is a *goy*. A protagonist of the third movie can already be considered as a fully-integrated participant of a social group he lives in, he even says to his wife 'You're of Spanish descent... I'm of Polish. We are the typical Argentine Jewish-Christian marriage.' The main protagonist explanation suggests that in Argentina this is something common and natural. However, apart of this statement there are no other references to cultural or religious issues. As Carolina Rocha says in her article: '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.'¹⁷ Ariel in *Law of the family* is an adult whose problems are subjective and individual and he is discovering rather his personal than cultural or religious identity, he is not reconsidering his cultural and ethnic background at the scale that was seen in previous movies.

Argentina is an immigrants' country (mass immigration started with the beginning of the XIX century), for decades the people who were born abroad formed greater part of society than the people who were born in Argentina. Such social configuration gives certain results and has a crucial impact, especially when we consider national or cultural identity and cultural assimilation. Moreover, a nation that is multi-ethnic has always a symptom of 'broken identity', identity that cannot be supported on one ethnic root but has to respect all the cultural and ethnical groups. And yet besides that, Argentina has other very specific feature. Its cultural subjectivity and national identity through the history were built on the fascination with European civilization. However, it has to be noticed that this process was artificial and imposed 'from above'. Amongst all Latin-American nations, Argentina does not represent a variation of *mestizo* or Indian past. Numerous Indian communities that lived on the territory of Argentina in pre-Columbian era were identified with backwardness and primitive life conditions. And on the other hand, the immigrants incoming from Europe were seen as an instrument that would civilize the savage territory (a rule that became an immigration law – to govern is to populate). Immigration policy that was conducted by Argentine government caused radical alteration of ethnic structure and crucial change in Argentina's cultural image. Immigrants that were arriving to Argentina since XIX century were not a unified and homogenized group; they represented diverse nationalities and various cultural identities. The feeling of identification with a motherland was surely visible among them. However as Gino Germani stated in his article this identification degree is supposed to have been at very low level as immigrants generally belonged to traditional social layers and not developed cultures. Italian and Spanish immigrants were not strictly connected with their nationality, other immigrant groups, as German and Swiss, obviously had stronger identification with their homeland culture, however they were not so numerous. European features did not dominate Argentine culture, although they are visible there more than in any other Latin-American country. As Germani says: '*After the*

¹⁷ Rocha, p. 44.

*deluge of immigration there was still an Argentina; the country did not lose its identity. But the old and new element had been fused and transformed. A new country emerged, and is still emerging, since the historical process set in motion by the mass nineteenth century immigration cannot be considered complete.*¹⁸

Today is the process of emigration that defines Argentina more accurately; it is mostly visible in *Lost embrace* where protagonists are searching for their European roots in order to emigrate from the country that is shed by economic crisis and instability. Considering the migration status of contemporary Argentina it is also important to observe another feature of today's situation, these days it is rather a country of Latin American than European immigration. Both in *Waiting for the Messiah* and *Lost embrace* there is a character Ramón of possible Andean origin, whose role in the community is subordinate to other characters in social structure. It is reality of many Peruvians and Bolivians who migrated to Argentina looking for better-paid jobs. Latin American cinema recently accepts this subject as well, for example in movies *Bolivia* (Adrián Caetano, 2001) and *Ulises* (Óscar Godoy, 2011). Lately Argentina receives regional economic immigration from other countries of South America such as Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay or Chile, although never at the scale known from previous period.

In the cinema of Burman we can experience the formation of new Argentine identity. Daniel Burman constructs the world of Argentine immigrants with specific for his art sense of humor by which he is rethinking the issue of cultural and national identity. What is crucial for Burman's films is the influence of his ancestors' cultural, ethnic and national past, although it is reinterpreted by the sense of his own generation, yet born in Argentina. Burman himself to be precise is Argentine-born (Creole) Ashkenazi Jew. In the trilogy of Daniel Burman we can notice that the statement about Jews always being a strangers among nations of the world is no longer true. Neither we will see the very famous European identity of La Plata that was forced to existence for centuries by nation political and cultural intellectuals. In that sense, cinema does not only reflect images of the culture or nation, it creates national culture, so the issues presented in the trilogy of Burman can be assumed as a creational representation of identity. As we can read in Tamara L. Falicov analysis of new Argentine cinema: *'In the realm of this cinema of crisis, one could argue that these new filmmakers felt that they needed to see the world differently. They diverged from previous auteurs: many in this new generation embodied the aesthetics of cine pobre signification, (...), they are working to expand the notion of Argentine citizenship to include subjects and characters who have traditionally been invisible or excluded from Argentine screens.'*¹⁹ One of the achievements of filmmakers such as Daniel Burman was revealing the truth about Argentine society. Characters that were absent in Argentine classical movie appeared in new cinematic wave and by that means the multi-cultural society was discovered.

18 G. Germani 'Mass Immigration and Modernization in Argentina', in: I. L. Horowitz (ed.) *Masses in Latin America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 173.

19 T. L. Falicov *The cinematic tango Contemporary Argentine film*, London, Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 133.

El Once Trilogy strictly treats with identity inquiries, in each movie the main protagonist, a neurotic character named Ariel, is somehow torn apart by identity quandaries, however in all those dilemmas cultural, national or personal and subjective aspects are pervading each other. Identity that appears in those movies is more like a chaotic mosaic than a stable construction on which one can once and for ever support own subjectivity and never revise it again. Being a Jew in multiple-cultural society is set by certain values – 'some emphasize the religious, some the cultural and still others the ethnic element of their Jewishness.'²⁰ Describing the Jewish community in Argentina, Burman is not referring to being a Jew as being a follower of certain religion; he treats it more like being a member of distinctive cultural or even ethnical group. Of course Jewish culture is strictly defined by the religion dogma but we have to notice that in his movies Burman is paying more attention to every-day life and irreligious aspects of being a Jew, and what is more important to being a Jew in multi-cultural society of Buenos Aires. The cultural-national identity of Argentina can be understood in the category of infinite quest and negotiation of values and frames. The titles of trilogy's parts are also symptomatic for the understanding of identity construction in Burman's cinema. They symbolize the way that the main protagonist is passing from desiring to break free from the Jewish *burbuja* and expecting 'something new' to come in *Waiting for the Messiah*, through the search of lost identity as a consequence of loss of some part of it in *Lost embrace*, to finally finding peace and personal identity, not the identity that is determined by the community, within the family in *Law of the family*. Somehow it can be said that the main protagonist of the trilogy grew up with its director.

Today reality is discursive to such an extent that identity cannot be considered as a stable state. Each day, each moment and each situation has to be negotiated upon many various factors. What comes out from the trilogy of Burman is the process-like and fluid mode of identity. Identity is not to be proclaimed, it is rather to be formed. It is a never-ending process of translations and tensions over which no one has control. National, cultural, ethnic and personal identity is a process rather than stability; it is only temporarily fixed in time during the moment of manifestation. To summarize, what we can observe in Daniel Burman's cinema is this cultural process of of personal and collective identity construction. In the own words of director *I felt like making these films and I continue to make them as a way to reflect upon my search for identity; however, it's not limited to Jews only. It has to do with a person whose identity is a part of a smaller group, and at the same time one that is part of a larger society. It is about those tensions.*²¹

20 V. A. Mirelman *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890 – 1930, In search of an Identity*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1990 cited in I. S. Goldman 'To be(come) Jewish and Argentine: Cinematic Views of Changing Nation', *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* Vol. 10, N°2, 1999.

21 Falicov, p. 135-136.