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"Yo creo que terminé todas mis guerras": Friendship and Politics Between Jews and Non-Jews in Jeanine Meerapfel's *El amigo alemán*

This article analyzes Jeanine Meerapfel's 2012 film El amigo alemán *(co-produced in Germany and Argentina) and focuses on the tensions between friendship, religion, and politics in the protagonists' forty-year friendship. Using Carl Schmitt's categories of friendship and enmity vis-à-vis politics, we see that friendship facilitates political identities yet, paradoxically, political identities can ultimately impede friendship. This study focuses on Meerapfel's film's representation of post-World War II Argentina, the 1968 student movements in Europe, and (post-)dictatorial Argentina as key moments in twentieth-century politics in which the film's characters must grapple with their own identities and political participation. These processes are encumbered by the ethical and historical weight of their respective families' histories as Jews and Nazis, respectively. This study of Meerapfel's film reveals the interplays between liberation struggles and religious identities as too difficult a sociopolitical landscape to navigate, whereby the film's protagonists are only finally able to relate to each other by detaching themselves from the historical weight of these tensions that continue to go unresolved.*

. . . . .

During a heated argument in Jeanine Meerapfel's 2012 film *Der Deutsche Freund/El amigo alemán* (*The German Friend*), title character Friedrich Burg (son of Nazis) decides to return from Hamburg, Germany—where he is currently a student—to his homeland of Argentina. He throws his Borges books into the trash and proclaims to his lifelong friend and love interest, Sulamit (the daughter of Holocaust survivors), that Borges—whom he and Sulamit had lovingly read together as children in Buenos Aires—is "no longer his Borges," ever since the author publicly shook the hand of the Argentine dictator, Juan Carlos

Onganía.[1] Here, in the wake of the May 1968 student movements in Europe, Friedrich declares that he can accomplish more for Latin American liberation struggles from within Latin America than from Europe. Through Friedrich's act of casting aside his Borges book, Meerapfel's film evokes memories of the debates surrounding the author's place within Latin American revolutionary culture.[2] Borges's political views were such a point of contention that denouncing him, as Friedrich does here, serves as shorthand to mark an individual as belonging to these revolutionary movements. *El amigo alemán*, as I will show, reveals the complexities and contradictions of liberation movements vis-à-vis relationships between Jews and non-Jews, a topic that has figured scantly into Jewish Latin American cinematic production.

In the same scene of the film, Friedrich, who has vacillated between self-identification as German and self-identification as Argentine, proclaims that he is "latinoamericano," adopting the language of and furthering his solidarity with global, liberation movements in favor of either German or Argentine nationality.[3] In a moment that crystallizes global liberation movements, the Tricontinental Congress was held in 1966 and adopted as a key component of its platform a pro-Palestine and anti-Zionist position.[4] The resolution would galvanize Jews involved in third-world liberation movements, forcing them into a moment of reckoning between their families' Jewish identity and the anti-Zionist stance of the political movements with which they identified. Moreover, the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 constituted watershed moments for Jewish communities around the world and moments of reckoning and grappling for Jewish revolutionaries allied with the liberation cause.[5] While the Israel-Palestine conflict is never explicitly named in the film, the entryways for Argentine Jews' political participation vis-à-vis global, third-world politics are a central preoccupation throughout Meerapfel's film.

The film's diegesis spans forty years of Argentina's history. *El amigo alemán* begins with Friedrich and Sulamit's childhood years in a wealthy suburban area of Buenos Aires; the children befriend each other and, shortly thereafter, Sulamit's father falls ill and dies. After her father's death, Sulamit and her mother move to a more modest neighborhood of Buenos Aires and Friedrich soon discovers that his father was a high-ranking SS officer. He informs Sulamit of his plans to go to Germany to study and to learn more about his father's Nazi

past. Sulamit later joins him in Germany as a student. Here, the two enter into a romantic relationship with each other; this relationship is impeded, however, by Friedrich's fervent focus on social justice and third-world liberation movements in the midst of the 1968 student protests. Friedrich returns to Argentina to fight for the revolution and Sulamit stays in Germany to study and to teach. He is imprisoned during the dictatorship; upon his release from prison, he joins a remote Mapuche village and, after many years, writes to Sulamit to invite her back to Argentina.

My analysis of Meerapfel's film begins with a consideration of Carl Schmitt's categories of friendship and enmity vis-à-vis politics. I then offer an overview of Jewish Argentine film and its existing criticism as these pertain to the salient themes of *El amigo alemán*. I turn my focus to the historical context of the film's beginning scenes: the coexistence of Nazis and Jews in Peronist, post-World War II Argentina, a context from which anti-Semitism and Nazi sympathizing in Argentina are inextricable. From there, I explore questions of the family, assimilation, and hegemony in both a Jewish and non-Jewish context. Specifically, I will consider how these processes of assimilation and interpellation facilitate and prefigure individuals' political beliefs and identifications with political movements, both nationally and internationally. As I will show, these political identifications reach such a point that they impede interpersonal identifications. Ultimately, I argue that the protagonists' return to Argentina decades after their childhood years there, coupled with Friedrich's moving past his staunch commitment to global revolutionary struggles, facilitates a reconciliation with both self and other that finally allows the characters to sustain a relationship with each other.

The interplay between individuals' ideological identifications, on the one hand, and encounters with individuals from differing communities and beliefs, on the other, made for a rich, complex, and contradictory relationship between Jews, non-Jews, and the political sphere in post-World War II Argentina. In the case of *El amigo alemán*, it is Friedrich, the non-Jewish character, who embodies the tensions and contradictions of Jewish leftist struggles; in a sense, Friedrich, through his close friendship with Sulamit, takes on the grief and tragedy of the Holocaust. From the film's beginning, his acts of friendship and affinity

towards Sulamit are repeatedly depicted as being motivated by the injustices and hardships visited upon Sulamit as a Jew in a post-Holocaust and, in many instances, anti-Semitic world.

Throughout the film, war, politics, friendship, and religious affiliation are constantly maintained in tension with one another. Friendship and enmity are repeatedly figured as determining individuals' political orientations. As Carl Schmitt noted in his 1932 *The Concept of the Political*: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (26). Schmitt makes clear here—and Derrida would later echo in *The Politics of Friendship*—that without the possibility of war, there would be no friendship. Schmitt elaborates: "A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction between friend and enemy and hence a world without politics . . . there would not be a meaningful *antithesis* whereby men could be required to sacrifice life, authorized to shed blood, and kill other human beings" (35). As my analysis of the film will underscore, it is through politics that friendship and enmity are facilitated. Friedrich befriends Sulamit and, from the inception of this friendship, Nazism becomes his enemy, an enemy that will broaden to include global imperialist forces writ large.

Politics and war, however, are also figured in the film as impeding meaningful friendship. In this vein, philosopher Gabriella Slomp delineates in her reading of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* three types of enmity (and, conversely, friendship): conventional, real, and absolute. The latter, formed out of global revolutionary commitment, effects what Slomp terms "abstract friendship:"

> Although the global revolutionary or global terrorist may have physical contacts with some friends, he is equally committed to friends whom he may have never physically met or even seen. This type of person is willing to kill and die for abstractions, be they ideals or people. For Schmitt, ideologies such as Leninism or religious fundamentalism have to some extent contributed to the development of absolute enmity and its counterpart: abstract friendship. (206)

As I will show, such "abstract friendship" impedes specific interpersonal relationships such as the friendship between Sulamit and Friedrich ("real" or "existential" friendship in Schmitt's terms). Indeed, it is only through Friedrich's moving past his fervent commitment to global

revolutionary causes and the absolute enmity therein that he is finally able to reestablish a relationship with his childhood friend Sulamit. The historical, political, and social weight of the Holocaust and post-World War II politics serves at times to facilitate and, at others, to impede the friendship between the film's protagonists. World War II and its aftermath—a history that will later give way to Cold War politics and global liberation movements—set the stage for the meeting of these two individuals and for their mutual affinity to develop over decades. However, the increasingly fervent political identifications of the film's title character, Friedrich, impede the realization of their friendship and subsequent romantic relationship.

Jewish Community and Identity in Twenty-First-Century Argentine Film Production

Despite the emergence of a significant corpus of cultural and media studies focused upon Jewish Latin American cultural production in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century (Sheinin and Barr 1996; Foster 2009), recent analyses have shown that more comprehensive studies of Jewish Latin American film are still necessary (Rein and Tal 2014). With the advent of so-called "New Argentine Cinema" late in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Jewish filmmaking has proliferated through directors such as Daniel Burman, Martín Rejtman, Esteban Sapir, and the work of David Blaustein. Most studies have focused on Jewish film production in Latin America either as an analog for the mainstream white middle-class Argentine experiences in the age of neo-liberalism and globalization or have tended to focus on the memory of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and/or stereotypes of Judaism.

In contrast, relatively little critical attention has been paid to the political and ideological tensions depicted in Jewish Argentine cinema, likely because these issues have not been overtly treated in much of Argentina's Jewish film production. Nevertheless, subtle mentions of the political and ideological tensions within the Jewish community in recent Argentine history have been included in the work of Daniel Burman as well as in the documentary production of filmmaker David Blaustein.[6] While historians and political analysts have begun to

revisit the particular ethical and political dilemmas that such events as the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War presented to young Jews in Argentina, these issues have scantly figured into analyses of Jewish cultural production.[7] Similarly, as Rein and Tal recently posited, "the place of Jews in the political cinema that flourished in the sixties and seventies has not been studied either" (3).[8] While the political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s may well have constituted the apex of the mutual imbrication between politics and cinema, present-day film production nonetheless continues to be imbued with political preoccupations.[9] Rein and Tal's assertion that the place of Jews in 1960s and 1970s political cinema has been largely overlooked holds true also for twenty-first-century Jewish film. The intricacies of the dynamics between Jews and the political sphere as treated in cultural production have been largely eschewed by film and literary critics of contemporary Latin America.

Despite this lacuna within existing film analysis, the relationship between Jews and politics is a main thematic axis of Meerapfel's film. As Daniela Goldfine has argued, both the Holocaust and the country's latest military dictatorship have been common topics for filmmakers of Meerapfel's generation.[10] Similarly, as Patricia Nuriel notes in her review of *My German Friend*, "the Shoah is the underlying current that spans the length of the story" (108). Where Meerapfel's film differs from other filmmakers of her generation's depictions of Jewish culture in twentieth-century Argentina (and indeed, expands on topics suggested in her own previous films, such as *La amiga*), however, is in her film's explicit treatment of the intersections of religious/ethnic categories, politics, and interpersonal relationships.[11] The Holocaust and Nazism are depicted in the film not as its main focus, but as a background of ethnic and ideological identifications that the children of both Nazis and Holocaust victims would later have to navigate as they came to assimilate into mainstream Argentine culture and formed their own political affinities.

Throughout *El amigo alemán*'s storyline, key moments of Argentina's history are depicted and the film's narrative is therefore relatable to both Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines. Tzvi Tal concludes his book chapter on Jewish Argentine cinema: "the cinematic history of the Jewish family is also the history of the Argentine people . . . Despite the xenophobic anti-Semitic attitudes of a residual minority, most of the

Argentine population recognizes itself in these cinema images of the people once known as *'rusos'* and can identify with the small successes and misfortunes of the Jews in the film" (387). Tal thus shows that the experiences of Jewish Argentines depicted in recent Jewish filmmaking are relatable to a broader Argentine audience. Similarly, the story of *El amigo alemán*'s Jewish family throughout the decades of the mid-to-late twentieth century serves to underscore some of Argentina's history as a whole during the same time period.

However, in the case of *El amigo alemán*—and, undoubtedly, in other Jewish film productions—what is more interesting about the Jewish characters' relation to mainstream culture is not the degree to which the former constitute an analog (or, as Tal argues elsewhere, an allegory) for the latter. Rather, we may consider the complex interplays between self and other, between assimilation and difference, that are constantly in flux throughout the film and that facilitate reconciliation within and between individuals' own life stories, their family/community's history, and their country's history. Moreover, the complexities and tensions shown within the film's protagonists are relatable to individuals of many backgrounds—be they Jewish or gentile, immigrants or long established Argentine families.

In a similar vein, in his reading of Levinas's *Totality and the Infinite*, Pablo Dreizik concludes "quizás lo 'argentino' cuestione nuestro judaísmo en lo que éste tiene de más cerrado y vuelto sobre sí, y también 'lo judío' cuestione los aspectos más arcaicos y atávicos de lo 'argentino.' Cuestionados por el otro, en una constante desapropiación y puesta en cuestión, nos descubrimos más judíos" (132). Likewise, Tzvi Tal and Raanan Rein assert, "the representations of Jewish experiences in film and art can also be regarded as test cases for the multiple negotiations of collective identities in Latin America" (6). Jewish Argentine cultural production presents a particular challenge to the consideration of ethnic, religious, and political categories due to the complexities of these multiple negotiations of collective identities. Meerapfel's film depicts Jewish Argentine identity as a process that necessarily challenges itself insofar as it is constituted by friendships with non-Jewish Argentines as well living outside the country.[12]

Peronist Argentina and the Coexistence of Nazis and Jews

The particular political climate of 1950s Argentina that allowed for the coexistence of both Jews and Nazis is depicted in the film's beginning as we see Sulamit and her father drive his car through their wealthy suburban neighborhood of Buenos Aires. The convertible stops in front of the kosher store, where he tells Sulamit to wait in the car while he goes in. While crossing the sidewalk, Mr. Loewenstein coldly acknowledges Friedrich's parents, his across-the-street neighbors, in German, and they respond politely, though not effusively. Plastered to both the side of the Kosher butcher's storefront and the business across the street—which the Burgs then enter—are posters of Perón.[13]

In this shot of the film, Mr. Loewenstein, the Burgs, and Perón's profile all fill the frame, reminding us as viewers of Perón's ambiguous and controversial policies regarding both the Axis during World War II and the immigration of Nazis into Argentina following the war. At the same time that Perón permitted the entrance of many Nazi officials into Argentina, he also established such initiatives as the Jewish-Peronist *Organización Israelita Argentina* and gave many Jewish Argentines public offices, efforts that were met with varying degrees of success, as historians continue to debate to what extent Jewish communities in Argentina supported Perón during his presidency. While Uki Goñi has focused on Perón's strategies to bring Nazis into Argentina, Raanan Rein recently noted that the Jewish community within Argentina was divided regarding its stance on Perón, concluding: "Neither the collective memory of Argentine Jews nor the history books seem to retain much recall of the fact that many Jews did in fact support Perón and the Justicialist movement in its early years" (167). Likewise, Ronald C. Newton notes the many "hoaxes, forgeries, unanswered propaganda ploys, and assorted dirty tricks" that continue to confound the historical record of Germans and Nazis in post-World War II Argentina (170). While the Loewensteins' opinions of Perón's leadership are never mentioned in the film, the repeated mentions of Perón not only orient the film's audience chronologically, but also suggest that Peronism had a direct bearing on the protagonists' ideological affinities and their life trajectories, as I will develop further.

Sulamit's coming-of-age is punctuated by Perón's being forced to leave the country in 1955. When her ailing father is taken to the

hospital, the ambulance drives out of sight from in front of the Loewensteins' home and a vehicle announcing Peronist propaganda enters the frame. The film thus signals a move from family to politics, a tension that will repeatedly arise in the protagonists' lives. Once her father is in the hospital, hospital workers rush out of the building, informing Sulamit and her mother that Perón has been ousted and the military has taken over the country. After Sulamit's father dies and Perón goes into exile, Perón's name is never again mentioned in the film. Sulamit's life is doubly galvanized at a young age by the simultaneous loss of both her father and Perón.

Despite Perón's efforts to improve the lives of Argentina's Jews, anti-Semitism certainly existed in Argentina in the post-World War II period (and, indeed, continues to exist). Moreover, many historians and critics have scrutinized whether the country was indeed a melting pot at this time and have referred to the peaceful coexistence of Jews and non-Jews as a myth. Of course, the presence of Nazi officers in Argentina, as we see through the film, impeded assimilation processes by German immigrants, both on behalf of Nazis who discriminated against Jews and on behalf of Jewish Germans who suspected that fellow Germans might be Nazis.

Sulamit is depicted as a brave young woman who is outspoken about Nazism and anti-Semitism. Once she begins attending public school after her father's death, she and fellow members of the school newspaper write about Eichmann. She shows the story to Friedrich, who tells her that in his school they would not be allowed to publish the political cartoon they drew because at his German preparatory school it is not seemly to speak of Nazis. After the piece is published, she is beaten in the streets by a group of boys as they call her "judía de mierda."[14] Her mother meets with the school director who assures them that the boys will be expelled, to which her response is to ask if the boys come from German families. Again, as the film suggests through Mr. Loewenstein's encounter with the Burgs at the beginning of the film, Sulamit's family is depicted as being wary of other Germans out of suspicion that they may be Nazis.

Family and Generation Gaps

While the differences between families of different religious and ethnic backgrounds are underscored in the film, tensions within families are also brought to the fore throughout *El amigo alemán*—most notably in Friedrich's rejection of his family's Nazi past, but also through Sulamit's interactions with her family. The family unit is figured as a mechanism by which beliefs are determined and crystallized, but also as a force against which children rebel in order to form their own beliefs that are distinct from those of their parents. Like friendship, family is presented in the film as the product of a tension sustained between self and other, between like and unlike.

The generation gaps between both Friedrich and Sulamit and their respective parents evince the complexities of immigration as well as of the political and historical circumstances of 1950s and 1960s Argentina. In their 2004 study *Lazos de familia: Herencias, cuerpos, ficciones*, Ana Amado and Nora Domínguez focus on the family and specifically on the figure of family "ties" affirming: "al subrayar lo familiar desde los *lazos* intentamos poner en evidencia el doble mecanismo de enlace y separación, de atadura y corte, de identidad y diferencia que funda lo familiar en tanto proceso y a partir del cual se puede leer el orden político, social y cultural de la Argentina contemporánea" (14). "Lazos" and their necessary contradictions are present in Meerapfel's film through the staggering generation gaps between parents and children. We are first made aware of these generation gaps through the different linguistic registers that characterize the different generations depicted in the film. In both the Loewensteins' and the Burgs' homes, the parents speak in German while their children answer them in Spanish. In this regard, the mother tongue is used to unite parents and children insofar as the children understand what their parents tell them, yet at the same time there is a linguistic divide created by their children's refusal to answer them in German.

The generation gap between Friedrich and his parents reaches such a point that he ceases to have any contact with them, whereas Sulamit and her mother are shown to quarrel—with her mother shouting in German and Sulamit in Spanish—although they always reconcile. Shortly after Sulamit arrives in Germany, she asks Friedrich how his mother is, only to learn that she had died; Friedrich informs Sulamit

that he did not tell her about his mother's passing because he disavowed his family upon learning the truth about his father's Nazi past. He then shows an uncomfortable yet disinterested Sulamit photographs of his father's Nazi friends whom she had met as a child and explained that one of them had been responsible for Eichmann's immigration into Argentina and that another had been in charge of smuggling the Third Reich's monies stolen from Holocaust victims into the country. Becoming increasingly indignant, he proclaims, "I am the son of that man, do you see?" Sulamit, on the contrary, remains calm and tells him that she, too, is the child of her parents. Sulamit and Friedrich's friendship is thus figured as being complicated not by the fact that Friedrich's parents were Nazis, but by Friedrich's consuming need to compensate for his parents' past, whereas Sulamit is repeatedly depicted as being aware of her family's past grievances, but eager to shed history's burden.

Of particular relevance to this film, generation gaps have been understood within cultural analyses of Jewish community in 1960s Argentina to be connected to the younger generation's political commitment. In her analysis of linguistic divides between Jewish youth and their parents, historian Beatrice Gurwitz states that within Argentina's Jewish community of the late 1960s: "the youth found the older generation, despite its efforts to adapt, fundamentally incapable of grasping the nuances of what a revolutionary community in Argentina should look like" ("Generation and Innovation" 259–60). In this way, we may understand the discrepancies between youth and their parents as related to individuals' processes of forming and expressing political allegiances.

Assimilation and Peronist Hegemony

As an opposing force to family bonds, assimilation is figured in the film as a process of moving out of one's own family circle and into a broader Argentine community. We may term this broader community cultural hegemony, defined by Gramsci as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group (12). Over the course of their adolescence, Friedrich and Sulamit are shown to assimilate into 1950s and 1960s hegemonic Argentina. In the case of both characters, we observe that their assimilation processes are marked by

a displacement from their upper-class neighborhood and lifestyle into middle- or working-class sectors. Meerapfel's film reveals hegemony's prevalence not among the upper class—where we are shown wealthy immigrants who maintain their native countries' linguistic and cultural practices—but rather among the popular classes, where nationalism and assimilation are the norm.

Regarding the working class and hegemony in Argentina, Jon Beasley-Murray, quoting Ernesto Laclau, affirms in *Posthegemony: Political theory in Latin America*:

> The working class becomes hegemonic by also being populist. Populism, precisely because it is hegemony itself, is no distraction or deviation from socialism. Far from it: "A 'socialist populism' is not the most backward form of working-class ideology but the most advanced—the moment when the working class has succeeded in condensing the ensemble of democratic ideology in a determinate social formation within its own ideology." (51)

By Laclau's and Beasley-Murray's estimations, Perón's populist leadership and its effects—even and especially after his exile in 1955—facilitated a working-class hegemony in Argentina. As I will show here, the characters' interpellations in this working-class hegemony are revealed through linguistic and class markers (and religious, in Sulamit's case) that are different from their parents' self-identifications. Moreover, as Laclau's and Beasley-Murray's analyses of Peronist Argentina evince, this hegemony is tied to socialist principles. By this token, we may understand the characters' later participation in socialist and liberation struggles as a continuation of the processes of interpellation in the political sphere as adolescents adapting to working- and middle-class hegemony.

While Sulamit is represented as assimilating into the Christian community by celebrating Christmas with Friedrich's family rather than Hanukkah with her own, her family continues to conserve its Jewish identity. The film thus depicts a growing generational, cultural, and linguistic divide between Sulamit and her mother. Moreover, her parents continually refer to Friedrich and his family as "the Germans," treating him and his family as others because, unlike them, they are not Jewish. This way of referring to Friedrich—from which the very title of the film derives—also glosses the Loewensteins' own difficulty in identifying themselves as German in the wake of the Holocaust's

atrocities. The family continues to speak German at home and shows a reluctant assimilation into non-German or non-Jewish Argentine culture. At the same time that the life trajectories of *El amigo alemán*'s protagonists dovetail with the global issues of the Holocaust, Cold War politics, and liberation movements, Friedrich and Sulamit's story is distinctly Argentine. In addition to the coexistence of both Jews and Nazis, the historical moment in which they grew up also called for a greater amount of assimilation into mainstream Catholic or lay culture.

After Sulamit's father's passing, she begins to attend a public school in Buenos Aires rather than the French private school where she had previously studied; we understand that she is now assimilating into middle-class Buenos Aires culture outside the German immigrant community. When she changes schools, we see her mother ironing her white apron—a stark juxtaposition with the rich, dark tones of the sweater and plaid skirt that she donned to attend the French school—which they then fumble to put on properly. Sulamit is shown assembled with the other students at her public school singing the national hymn as the flag is raised, a ritual observed every morning at public schools in Argentina but not at her previous school or at Friedrich's German School. In this way, her changing of schools is squarely figured as an insertion into the Argentine national project that is visually sustained by the lack of contrast between the students' white aprons and the light gray of the schoolyard.[15] This image of the Argentine flag creates a subtle yet important contrast with the so-called "myth of dual loyalty" that pervaded mainstream conceptions of Jewish Argentines in the years following the founding of Israel.[16]

Assimilation is also figured as facilitating relationships. Whereas in her French school Sulamit had been shown as an outsider (through a scene in which the teacher informs her that her ethics class, which she attends while her companions have religion class, has been cancelled for the day), we see her and a female classmate innocently take each other's hands. In this whitewashed space of the schoolyard, their holding hands suggests that within this middle-class hegemony Sulamit is able to find her niche more easily than in her previous elite school. At the same time, Sulamit's mother begins to date another man, and we hear her mother speak in Spanish—rather than German—for the first time in the film. We thus see that her mother also begins to assimilate into the non-German Argentine community. Moreover, as Sulamit will later

highlight in a conversation with her mother and her partner, ("she's a Yiddish mother," she explains to him), her mother's partner is also from outside the Jewish community. While she accuses her mother of having found a replacement for her father, as she matures she is able to have a more peaceful relationship with her mother and accepts her companion.

Friedrich also assimilates into non-German Buenos Aires. He leaves home after discovering his father's S. S. documents and moves to a shantytown in a different part of the city to live among the people. Here, for the first time, we hear him referred to not as Friedrich but as "Federico." In this way, Friedrich's leaving home prefigures his later identification with liberation movements. At the same time, both Friedrich and Sulamit are depicted as having cast off their upper-class backgrounds as well as their German and/or Jewish identities. Meerapfel's film thus highlights the mutual imbrication between class and ethnicity; in both characters' move away from the upper classes of Buenos Aires society, they become less German and more Argentine as they assimilate into middle-class life.

German-Argentines and Germany 1968

The Loewensteins' and the Burgs' common origins in Germany serve more to divide the two families than to unite them. Early in the film Sulamit returns home from spending time with Friedrich and her father asks if she was with the Germans, to which she responds in the negative, explaining that Friedrich is Argentine, like her. Her response to her father signals the hope that her generation held for friendships and filial connections that would transcend the divisiveness that marked the generation before them. Mr. Loewenstein reacts to her assertion that she and Friedrich are both Argentine by shaking his head and lowering his eyes sadly.

An affinity for Germany is paradoxically juxtaposed in the film with Sulamit's linguistic and cultural assimilation into non-German and non-Jewish Buenos Aires youth culture of the 1960s. Her mother interprets her decision to go to Germany as a facet of her teenage rebellion and as part and parcel of belonging to mainstream youth culture. Nonetheless, she informs her mother that she is interested in going to study in a country where they at least know how to pronounce her last

name. Moreover, the first words we hear in the film are Sulamit's voice-over informing us that, when her parents officially named her as an infant, the civil servant informed them that the name did not exist in Argentina. The film thus underscores Sulamit's conflicted identification as German and Argentine: she is aware that she does not fully fit into either category. Once in Germany, she struggles to master the German language, but ultimately makes a career of teaching German-Spanish translation courses. Moreover, the film shows her return to Argentina multiple times. The film thus suggests that her identity lies somewhere in between being Argentine and being German.

The film's use of Germany as the country to which the characters travel facilitates a consideration of the effects of the European student movements of 1968, in which Friedrich becomes increasingly entrenched. Paradoxically, Friedrich's fervent commitment to issues of liberation and social justice—presented as a byproduct of his friendship with Sulamit—reach such an extreme that this friendship is no longer possible. Here, we may again consider my earlier mention of Schmitt's "abstract friendship," as opposed to real friendship and born of global revolutionary commitment. When Sulamit arrives in Frankfurt to study, we see her overwhelmed and exhausted as she tries to follow Friedrich's incessant tirades on revolution and liberation struggles. As their relationship takes on a sexual valence, their once lighthearted friendship is figured as being overtaken by politics. We see Sulamit increasingly impatient and exhausted with Friedrich's obsession with revolution and armed struggle. As Meerapfel explains in the "making of" interviews for the film's DVD release, Friedrich's storyline is one with which she was familiar from both her time in Argentina and after she moved to Germany. In Germany, she met students whose parents were Nazis and who joined in the revolutionary fervor of 1968 in part as a form of rebellion against their parents. In Argentina, she knew individuals who took up arms and participated in violent guerrilla struggles. Friedrich's life trajectory—and particularly Meerapfel's explanation of it—elucidates tensions among global revolutionary struggles at the same time that they are positioned as inexorably linked to one another.

The film depicts Sulamit in a position of having to choose between the militant fighter and a more passive, academic love interest. We see Sulamit seated at a table in a university common space while Friedrich argues for the necessity of guerrilla tactics. As she sits silently,

a young professor, Michael, remarks to her that moderation is key in the struggle. She smiles and the two grow closer after she tells him she can no longer bear to attend Friedrich and his friends' meetings about revolution. After fighting with Friedrich over his stubbornness and inability to talk about anything other than revolution, she and Michael begin a romantic relationship. Whereas the film rarely shows Sulamit and Friedrich caress each other, Michael is repeatedly depicted as being affectionate and doting towards Sulamit. Unlike Friedrich, who is constantly consumed by his political passions, Michael is shown to be uninterested in the liberation struggles to which Friedrich and his peers are allied.

Jews, Non-Jews, and Liberation Movements

During their time in Germany, Friedrich comments to Sulamit, "quizá sea por eso que te quiero tanto," to which she responds with a blank stare. He goes on, "porque sos judía," evincing an affinity towards her motivated by an identification with her on the lines of minoritarian identities. His affinity towards her—motivated by his feelings of guilt and complicity over his father's Nazi background—not only constitutes the basis for their friendship but, as we see here, is part and parcel of his commitment to issues of social justice and equality throughout his life.

In light of the film's treatment of Jewish identity and 1960s political movements, the film's elision of any mention to Israel or Zionism is striking. The 1966 Tricontinental Congress's position in favor of Palestine and thus necessarily against Zionism would certainly have informed such individuals as Friedrich, who positioned themselves in support of liberation movements, creating a paradox since his staunch commitments to social justice and equality are shown to stem from the injustices and cruelty that Jews experienced during the Holocaust. Sulamit's relative disinterest in the same liberation movements might be attributed to her own Jewish identity. León Rozitchner addressed this theme in his essay *Ser judío*, in which he proclaims, "Sí, es verdad: hay que sacrificar lo judío que se opone a la revolución" (15). Rozitchner goes on to ask, writing during the Six-Day War: "¿qué tengo yo de judío frente al actual conflicto árabe-israelí?" (15). If many Jews disavowed their religious and ethnic identities in order to assimilate to the

broader ethos of revolutionary movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, in Meerapfel's film we observe the inverse of the same phenomenon. Friedrich identifies with Sulamit and the Jewish community's hardships and this identification serves as the basis for his fervent affiliation with liberation movements. The film's eschewing mentions of Zionism or Israel, I maintain, can be attributed to the contradictions between self-identification as Jewish and revolutionary, historical, and ideological tensions that remain unsolved. These tensions strongly characterize Jewish political actors of Meerapfel's generation.

The film thus contrasts with what Amalia Ran has observed among cultural production from the generation younger than Meerapfel, for whom: "Zionism, Israel, Hebrew, or Yiddish, along with the memories of the past, are connected to a new type of sensibility: they form an integral part of the Jewish identity of the younger generation without ever provoking a crisis. This new tendency generates a type of *cool* Judaism, secular and amusing, free from the weight of history and the responsibility of collective memory" (35). We observe that for a filmmaker of Meerapfel's generation—who lived through the establishment of the state of Israel, Nazis in Peronist Argentina, the student movements of 1968, and the tumultuous political situation of Argentina in the 1970s—such a Jewish identity "free from the weight of history" cannot take into account Zionism or Israel.

Abstract Friendship and Revolutionary Sex

The film reveals the apex of Friedrich's revolutionary fervor as a moment that precludes real, interpersonal affinity and simultaneously facilitates casual sexual encounters. Once Friedrich returns to Argentina, we see him in an organizational meeting with an armed guerrilla group. In this meeting, he is shown with a woman whom he kisses and who latches on to him but who barely speaks, a stock character depicted as an accessory to him just as his weapon is an accessory for the guerrilla fighter. Their passion towards each other is figured as but a facet of revolutionary commitment. The scene dovetails with what many former revolutionaries have posited about militant political culture in which sex and casual relationships commonly played a part, less of an affective connection than a part of the fast-paced and passionate lifestyle

of young revolutionaries who may lose their lives for the cause at any moment. For instance, Nicolás Casullo, a well-known revolutionary, remarked about sex and revolutionary culture: "the revolution was also made in bed: the more orgasms you had, the more revolutionary you were, and the more revolutionary you were, the more orgasms you had" (qtd. in *La voluntad: Una historia de la militancia* 795). Like Schmitt's category of the global revolutionary's "abstract friendship," many revolutionaries exhibited promiscuity as part of their ethos.

Once Friedrich has returned to Argentina and the country's military dictatorship begins in 1976, Sulamit grows increasingly concerned over Friedrich's whereabouts and calls a family friend of the Burgs who is a lawyer in Argentina, only to have him hang up on her when she mentions Friedrich, who has become persona non grata to his family after his falling out with his father. Unlike most political prisoners who were held in clandestine torture and detention centers throughout the country during the dictatorship, Friedrich is detained in a prison in Rawson, which Sulamit learns through contacting the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.[17] It is intimated that his being held there, with his whereabouts known—as opposed to the situation of the so-called *desaparecidos*, whose detention the military government never openly admitted—has to do with his father's connections, thus evoking the connections between the Nazi officials who escaped to Argentina and the torture and murder tactics practiced by the country's military regime. When Sulamit goes to visit him, she is disappointed to see that he registers very little emotional reaction to seeing her, making mention only of his plans to help the Mapuche recover their land once he is released from prison. Again, he identifies with an abstract concept of camaraderie and solidarity yet is unable to reciprocate specific interpersonal affinity.

The Land and Real Friendship

The film's circular diegesis is bookmarked visually by sweeping takes of the Patagonian landscape. The film begins *in media res* and we see Sulamit on the *Tren Patagónico* as she is traveling to see Friedrich. During the first three minutes, we see the clouds rising through the Andes as the train cuts through the countryside. At the end of the film,

we are returned to this train trip and to Patagonia where Friedrich now lives among the Mapuche. While the film's narrative vacillates between Germany and Argentina, we see no similar visual representations of Germany, simply domestic spaces and some city street shots. Meerapfel thus visually emphasizes a strong connection to the Argentine land. The shots of the Andes are distinctly Argentine and Latin American. These images dovetail with Friedrich's aforementioned self-definition as "latinoamericano" and his desire to help the Mapuche people to recover their land.

After he is released from prison, Friedrich travels to a remote Mapuche village and declares to a man there that he has come to help them in their struggle for liberation, to which the gentleman replies that at the moment they are harvesting potatoes, and he is welcome to help them. Friedrich's principles are thus immediately—and comically—revealed as anachronistic and out of place. Once again, as in his conversation with Sulamit during her visit to him in prison, his politically charged discourse loses meaning within the context in which he finds himself. After spending a while working among the Mapuche and establishing personal relationships with individuals there, however, he changes, becoming less rigid and eventually writes to Sulamit to invite her to come to visit him.

In this space, Friedrich has established a lifestyle that offers him justice and contentment on a smaller scale, despite the failure of his previous quests for global liberation and justice. Sulamit asks Friedrich if the young man whom she meets outside his house is his son; he informs her that he is the son of a Nazi friend of his father's who, like Friedrich, has stopped speaking to his father and come to live with him. However, unlike in his previous diatribes vilifying his father, here Friedrich simply states, with slight resignation, that the young boy has come there to live. We thus see that his righteous indignation over his parents' Nazi past has given way to openness and compassion. Knowing that he will never be able to correct the world's injustices, he has begun to do what is within his own power to make the world a slightly better place.

Friedrich's changing focus to the land and to a connection with his fellow man is depicted as his impetus for inviting Sulamit to come to visit. The role of the land recalls Slomp's categories of friendship and enmity in her readings of Schmitt. She affirms, "What sets the revolutionary apart from the autochthonous or telluric partisan is the lack

of a special bond to a particular land" (203). Meerapfel remarks that she chose the opening and closing locale of the "casa de los cóndores" because of its significance as the place to which condors return each year after traveling thousands of kilometers. This space thus serves as a visual metaphor for the trajectories of Sulamit and Friedrich's lives. After decades of living in different hemispheres and divided by political struggles, they have returned to each other and to their shared country of birth.

The film ends with Friedrich asking Sulamit if she plans to stay there with him, to which she responds by asking if he will come with her. We understand that the film's central question of whether its protagonists are German or Argentine will likely never be resolved, and that their identities as second-generation immigrants will always be imbued with the stories of Germany that predate their existence and that have influenced the trajectories of their lives. In the interior of the country and in the far reaches of Patagonia the protagonists are able to find an existence that is less bogged down in the wars of their parents, the weight of their own past (both shared and apart), and the seemingly irresolvable causes that have consumed most of their lives.

Conclusions

In the film's penultimate scene, Friedrich and Sulamit lie in bed together and he quotes a line from a Borges poem. Sulamit responds by asking him, "¿Terminaste tu guerra con nuestro poeta?" Friedrich answers her, "Yo creo que terminé todas mis guerras." This moment of nostalgic and sentimental identification through making love and reciting Borges is thus figured as being made possible through Friedrich's letting go of his all of his wars. Returning to Schmitt's categories of absolute enmity, we see that Friedrich's absolute enmity has ceded way to a more specific connection to the land and to the possibility of real friendship (which, for its part, has given to romantic love). Whereas Friedrich was previously capable only of abstract friendship and sexual relationships as part of his revolutionary commitment, he is now able to engage in specific interpersonal connections. His earlier denouncement of Borges evokes an entire generation's political ethos, while his final identification with Sulamit on the basis of having "finished his war"

with their beloved poet's questionable politics posits the possibility of moving beyond the categories of friendship and enmity perpetuated by an unchanging commitment to past political categories.

Bates College

NOTES

[1] Juan Carlos Onganía was de facto president of Argentina from 1966-70; his rule was marked by the repression of dissidence.

[2] Among these debates, perhaps most well-known is Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar's 1971 essay "Calibán," which indicts Borges as a bourgeois colonialist. In 1950s Argentina, two intellectual leaders who would be fundamental for 1960s and 1970s revolutionary movements—Juan José Hernández Arregui and Jorge Abelardo Ramos—criticized Borges by analyzing his elitist readings of the gaucho poem *Martín Fierro*. Ramos affirms: "como la clase obrera se ha transformado en la protagonista de la Revolución nacional . . . Borges se aplica a denostar la idea misma de la patria" (137), while Hernández Arregui concludes: "el borgismo es el vitral somero donde se refleja la frivolidad de las clases distinguidas" (111). Similarly, Adolfo Prieto dismissed Borges's literary criticism as "prescindible" and repeatedly defined him as "un literato sin literatura" (62). David Viñas defended Prieto's stance. In the 1980s, Borges would be vindicated by the comic strip depicting him, *Perramus*; as Casale O'Ryan notes, "in the face of the 'friend or foe' way of doing politics in the 1960s and 1970s, [*Perramus*'s] Borges can offer a more consensual and diverse mode" (151). More recently, Ariel Dorfman reflected on the inclusion of Borges in his library despite having being decorated by Pinochet, suggesting reconciliation with the author. Borges's politics vis-à-vis Jewish culture should also be noted: Aizenberg presents Borges as a "postcolonial precursor." Graff Zivin affirms that, while Borges's work does not constitute *literatura comprometida*, a story such as "Deutsches Requiem" nonetheless contains crucial political implications when one focuses, as Graff Zivin does, on the rhetoric of Jewishness therein. Silverstein notes the pro-Israel stance that Borges evinces through two poems penned in response to the Six-Day War.

[3] Gabriel García Márquez, upon interviewing Montoneros leader Mario Firmenich in 1977, remarked: "Antes del Che Guevara, los argentinos no se sentían latinoamericanos. Ahora, en cambio, creen ser ellos los únicos latinoamericanos."

[4] Argentina's delegation to the Tricontinental congress did not ratify the congress's anti-Zionist stance; nonetheless, many individuals affiliated with liberation causes in Argentina identified with the resolution and were therefore anti-Zionist.

[5] See Brodsky, Gurwitz, and Kranson.

[6] Daniel Burman's 2004 film *El abrazo partido* centers around Ariel Makaroff, whose father left to fight in the Yom Kippur War and never returned. Blaustein's *Hacer patria* (2006) revisits revolutionary militancy vis-à-vis Jewish identity in 1970s Argentina.

[7] See Gurwitz, "Zioism, Third-Worldism, and Argentine Youth at Crossroads."

[8] For example, Raymundo Gleyzer, whose parents founded the Jewish theater group Idisher Folk Theater, was a member of the armed revolutionary group *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*. In 1973 he formed the militant filmmaking group *Cine de la base*. He was disappeared by the military dictatorship in 1976.

[9] Amado: "sus principios éticos permanecen diseminados en imágenes y narrativas de categoría todavía imprecisa para nombrar" (10). As Amado argues, the links between politics and film have shifted since the heyday of *cine comprometido*, but have certainly not vanished.

[10] Marianne Hirsch maintains regarding postmemory: "'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (3). During a family gathering, an older relative gives Sulamit a ring that belonged to her great aunt for whom she is named who died during the Holocaust.

[11] *La amiga* (1987) starred Liv Ullman and Federico Luppi as a couple whose son is taken by the military regime; the wife's childhood friend, a Jewish woman of German ancestry, uses her social connections as a successful actress to help the couple find their son.

[12] Elkin describes Jews in post-World War II Argentina as a dynamic of "attraction and repulsion" (252).

[13] Nicolás Prividera analyzes Peronist posters in twenty-first-century Argentine films in *El país del cine*.

[14] Given Sulamit's age at the time, this incident most likely occurs during the country's period of democratic rule (1958-65). Leonardo Senkman notes that anti-Semitism was prevalent during this democratic period.

[15] The schoolyard raising of the flag is a prevalent trope in Argentine film. Benjamín Avila's 2011 film *Infancia clandestina* includes a scene in which its protagonist, Juan (son of Montoneros), refuses to raise the flag at school because he has been taught that the national flag is a flag of war. The iconic 1986 film *La historia oficial* begins with its protagonist, history teacher Alicia, with her students in the schoolyard as they sing the national hymn while the flag is raised. Jewish Austrian immigrant Max Glucksman collaborated with French-born director Eugene Py on the 1897 film *La bandera argentina*, one of the first films produced in Argentina.

[16] For more on the myth of dual loyalty, see Raanan Rein's *Argentina, Israel y los judíos: Encuentros y desencuentros, mitos y realidades* (2001).

[17] Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the group of mothers of individuals disappeared by the military regime, figure prominently in Meerapfel's *La amiga*. Gundermann interprets the film as a fictional testimonial account of the history of Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. It should also be noted here that an estimated 17-20 percent of the *desaparecidos* during the military dictatorship were of Jewish backgrounds (compared to one percent of the total Argentine population). Emmanuel Kahan focuses on Jews' experiences during the military dictatorship and notes that one of the difficulties that remains in analyzing the topic is the fact that many Jews ceased to self-identify as Jewish in the years leading up to the military dictatorship as a result of conflicts such as the Yom Kippur War (324).

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