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Review of FEMINA: Festival Internacional de Cinema Femenino [International Festival of Women’s Film], (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1-7, 2009)

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Review Essay: Brazilian Women Make Films


FEMINA, Festival Internacional de Cinema Femenino (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1-7, 2009), offered an array of short and long films by women directors, many of whom were Brazilian. Two themes that surfaced in the Brazilian films were body image and indigenous Brazilian women’s lives. The short films that examined body image—Eu e cocodrilos (Marcela Arantes, 2008, 17 minutes) and Phedra (Claudia Priscilla, 2008, 13 minutes)—addressed two facets of the topic. Eu e cocodrilos portrays an adolescent’s preoccupation with her body while Phedra tells the story of a Cuban transsexual performer who moves to Brazil in the 1950s. Although these films approach the theme of the body from different perspectives, they both explore the notion of femininity and the body. Raquel in Eu e Cocodrilos stuffs her bra before a party, watches a full-figured woman in the mirror of a locker room, presses her chest up against the glass of the shower door and draws the outline of a voluptuous body (much more so than her own). Arantes experiments with different perspectives in these scenes, including side shots of characters and their mirror reflection as well as Raquel’s own false reflection in the shower door. Phedra in the short film of the same name dresses like a woman and explains that she has more feminine characteristics than masculine—characteristics accentuated by makeup and clothing. In this film, Priscilla accentuates the relationship between form and content by including a sound track that engages Phedra’s own work as a singer. The protagonists in both films explore the dimensions of femininity, confront their own body image, and react to others’ views of their bodies.

The second major theme of the Brazilian films was indigenous Brazilian women’s lives, depicted primarily in Mulheres de Mamiraua (Jorane Castro, 2008, 40 minutes) and Piô Hóímanazé—a mulher xavante em sua arte (Cristina Flória, 2008, 52 minutes). Both films, featured in their sessions, showed the everyday lives of women from two Brazilian indigenous communities—the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve in Amazonas and the Aldeia Etenhiripita in Pimental Barbosa Indigenous Land in Mato Grosso. In Mulheres de Mamiraua, Castro alternates segments of interviews of women in the community—on topics such as their age, their husbands and children, their agricultural duties, and the importance of water in their lives—with images of their surroundings, the river they live along, and the lush plant life in the region. Although the alternating interview format can be monotonous, it functions well in this film because the subject matter is so interesting and because Castro includes close-up shots of the interviewees’ children and dwellings as the women discuss them. We hear the story of a woman with twenty-one children who gave birth to all of them at home, we see the women planting sugar cane together with their children as one woman explains that she is never alone when she is working and enjoys the company, and, above all, we see the effects of water and the lack thereof on the lives of these women. The women in Flória’s Piô Hóímanazé discuss their community’s traditions, emphasizing the changes that have occurred in the younger generations through more contact with outsiders (warazu). For many of these women it is important to conserve customs such as their secret natural remedy for pausing menstruation, shaving the head during mourning, giving the mother-in-law the initial care of a newborn baby, and...
naming babies after what a selected man of the community dreams for them. Interestingly, there are certain customs traditionally reserved for men that the younger women in the community have adopted, such as using war paint for ceremonies. Flória’s camera movements correspond to the mood of the women in her film; for example, she includes over-the-shoulder as well as medium and close-up shots in quick succession of the final war dance which match the intensity of the dance itself. Finally, both Mulheres de Mamirauá and Piô Hôimanazé present the tension between community traditions and outside influences; which the second punctuates by incorporating a final scene of a Xavante woman expressing her regret for divulging her community’s secrets.

The themes of Eu e Cocodrilos, Phedra, Mulheres de Mamirauá, and Piô Hôimanazé—A Mulher Xavante em Sua Arte represent tendencies within the larger group of Brazilian women’s films. The prevalence of the documentary genre, the genre of the last three films, is consistent with national trends; moreover, the themes of body image and indigenous communities are also representative of other films directed by Brazilian women.

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Nos encontramos ante la película más cara de la historia del cine mexicano, con un presupuesto de casi siete millones de dólares. Lógicamente es la versión cinematográfica de la novela homónima de Ángeles Mastretta de 1985. Una novela de la complejidad y riqueza de la de Mastretta es difícil de llevar al cine y la versión cinematográfica no deja de ser un resumen de la historia o una ilustración de la novela. Esto no quiere decir que la película no sea buena pero es ancilar al texto escrito. El cinematográfico se basa en tres personajes, el General Andrés Ascencio, protagonizado por un extraordinario Daniel Giménez Cacho. Este encarna el personaje basado de una manera libre en Maximino Ávila Camacho, general de división, el infame gobernador de Puebla de 1937 a 1941 y uno de los últimos caudillos de la Revolución.

Es un reto arriesgado el representar las múltiples caras de un personaje que es amoroso padre de familia, de una extendidísima familia ya que acumula casas chicas e hijos ilegítimos que Catalina, su esposa, debe educar, el político sanguinario pero también el populista, el compadre de sus compadres, el hombre que tiene que sentirse a gusto en uniforme de general, de charro, de esmoquin y de ranchero, el jefe político que asesinaba a sus enemigos y agasajaba a sus amigos. Ana Claudia Talancón, Catalina, vuelve a repetir su rol de sinónimo de la nación mexicana como el interpretado en El crimen del padre Amaro, abruma por su belleza y por su capacidad para evolucionar desde la adolescente de diecisésis años que se casa con el general hasta la mujer madura, la viuda de hierro que como matriarca hereda y conduce el imperio familiar. Catalina es el objeto del deseo de todos. Catalina, virgen y sin pulir, es el México que los revolucionarios van a disputarse con los “contemporáneos” con sus títulos universitarios, su conocimiento de idiomas, su refinamiento y su arte.

Carlos Vives (José María de Tavira), director de la Orquesta Nacional y príncipe de Bellas Artes, es el otro galán del México ya no virginal, sino enamorado, violado y resabiado por la Revolución. Ascencio ordena el asesinato de Vives, cercano a la extrema izquierda del régimen. La vieja revolución mata a la nueva, antes de que hubiera dado sus mejores frutos, pero el ataque al corazón de Andrés implica la muerte en vida de un régimen que se ahogó en su propia prepotencia, en sus excesos, en una revolución siempre inacabada, institucional, como terminó llamándose a sí misma sin una pizca de ironía, una semidemocracia, vertical y orgánica. Cinematográficamente la historia es un cúmulo de aciertos con algunos peros. El guión de la misma Mastretta y el director Sneider es correcto pero podíá haber sido mejor, se espera que una película de época sea larga, la historia podría...