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National Identity in 21st-century Cuban Cinema

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Dunja Fehimović, *National Identity in 21st-century Cuban Cinema: Screening the Repeating Island*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xiii + 281 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.99)

Dunja Fehimović's exploration of film culture and national identity in Cuba by way of an original and diverse examination of a number of recent films is bold and imaginative. It presents different ways to view Cuba's national identity, often seen as exceptional due to the country's particular geopolitical circumstances. That said, her insistence on the "anxiety over national identity" appears to be somewhat overplayed and relies on an exceptionalist view of Cuba's national identity as if other nations do not suffer similar anxieties.

Fehimović presents material in an original way, breaking the analysis of films into four subgroups that provide a useful framework within which to study film culture and national identity. This is an original approach, although I am not sure the work could sit alongside those of Michael Chanan, Andrea Noble, Lisa Shaw, and Stephanie Dennison as a "core text," due to its limited selection of films and a theoretical approach that does not allow it the scope of other books on national cinemas. But the level of scholarship is high and its strengths lie in the overall insight of the author, in her knowledge and academic rigour. The book's structure is also highly original and moves the research in the area forward by looking at films previously unexamined in this way.

The introductory chapter sets up the work extremely well, providing insight into the changing landscape of a national cinema that has moved from a coherent, controlled revolutionary system to one that is "more attuned to Antonio Benítez Rojo's distinctive vision of the cultures and histories of the Caribbean" (p. 1). It attests to the more recent diversification and "chaos" of Cuban cinematic production in an increasingly globalized context that has "multiplied and fragmented concepts of Cubanness" (p. 7).

Chapter 2 examines vampires and zombies from the Cuban screens, which makes for a useful analysis of Cuban national identity and the anxieties associated with an ever-changing sociopolitical landscape. In particular, the analysis of *Juan de Los Muertos* (Alejandro Brugués, 2011) is interesting as it illustrates the emerging importance of international coproductions, capital, and the market for Cuban filmmakers, at the same time as expressing the way the "spectre of capital" (p. 55) looms over the nation and its revolutionary identity.

Chapter 3 examines the childhood connection in two films, *Viva Cuba* (Juan Carlos Cremata, 2005) and *Habanastation* (Ian Padrón, 2011), and continues in the exploration of sites of "anxious uncertainty" (p. 92) surrounding Cuban national identity. It asserts that the films are "emphatically Cuban," but that the

national community and identity depicted within are both “virtual and real” (p. 138), giving highly polished insight into the configuration of the space of the nation.

In Chapter 4, Fehimović makes a close analysis of *Se Vende* (Jorge Perugorria, 2012) and *José Martí: El ojo del canario* (Fernando Pérez, 2010), arguing that they both show how the spectre of the past haunts the present in today’s Cuba. This argument is not new but the analysis is, and it is highly effective here. The chapter jumps around somewhat superfluously between Barthes, Benjamin, and Derrida, but ultimately lands on the premise that the “anxieties, hopes and needs” of the present are “formed and informed by the [...] omnipresence of the past” (p. 190).

Chapter 5 considers *La guarida del topo* (Alfredo Ureta, 2011) and *Jirafas* (Kiki Álvarez, 2013), focusing on the notion of connection/disconnection and the role that the sea plays as both a border crossing that might dissolve or blur the boundaries of national identity and a divide that separates, either of which produces anxieties of its own.

Ultimately, this is a successful piece of work and should have a wide readership in Area Studies, Film Studies, and Cultural Studies concerning national identity in both the United Kingdom and the United States. It will mainly be suitable for postgraduate studies and will be of interest to all academics in Film Studies, Spanish and Latin American Studies, Cultural Studies, and Caribbean Studies. The book is coherent and very well researched, and although at times unnecessarily theoretical, the quality of writing is high. Fehimović has a strong command of the subject area, and the book is rigorous, making a valuable addition to the field.

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