Abstract

„The Way We Were"

– A cultural sociological reading of the representation of the Jewish identity in the American feature films –

From the beginning of the American movie history, there were lots of movies made, which had Jewish characters in leading roles. The Jewish characters in the movies of course not representing the Jews as they existed in the American society. The presentation of the characters in the movies based on the view of the makers, how they see the Jews, which based on how the society of different periods sees the Jews. Movies always wanted to represent the view of the society – mainly in the American movie industry, which wanted to reach financial success, so they wanted to fit the audience's expectations, sometimes even change it.

By watching the Jewish characters in the American movies, we won't be able to find out the American Jewish identity as it was, but we can see how the moviemakers and the audience wanted to see them, actually what kind of identity they would like if the Jews had.

The topic of the research is to examine the Jewish identity represented in the American feature films from the view of the sociology of culture. The hypotheses are:

Before the II. World War the Jewish identity in the American films is a typical immigrant identity: has its bases in the European (Jewish) culture, but on the new land feels free to create oneself a totally new identity (based on the idea of the "American Dream")

Since the II. World War and the anti-Semitism was a European event, maybe the American Jews didn't made such a fundamental element of their identity out of the Holocaust as the European Jews. After the II. World War the American movie makers must familiarize the American society with the Holocaust, that changes the Jewish characters in the movies.

Almost 50 years after the II. World War the Jewish characters seems to be again something similar as they were before the Holocaust, but not immigrants anymore, but real American citizens, who are part of the American society.

So at the beginning we see in the movies Jewish immigrants who don't want to be Jewish (in a "European way") anymore, but want to be Americans, although they don't really know what does that mean. Later, as the anti-Semitism also takes its effect in the USA, the Jewish characters seems to disappear from the movie screen. As the USA enters the II. World War –

and against the Nazi side – and even later, when the truth about the concentration camps became uncovered, the Jewish characters appear again in the movies with a very strong Jewish identity. This phenomenon on the movie screen for the sixties leads some kind of "Jewish coming out": (the artists themselves also, but we examine the movie characters) became proud Jews at the first place, and Americans only on the second place.

Some more decades are needed to these Jews to turn back to their previous – at the beginning of the century – dream: about the nineties they really have the opportunity to became American and make real the "American Dream", but not by leaving their Jewish identity, as they wanted, but making out a new kind of Jewish identity: an American Jewish identity.

Of course we don't know how it fits to the real American Jewish identity, we can just see as it happens in the movies. This kind of forming out a new kind of Jewish identity and as it can be seen in the American feature films, is unique phenomenon in the Jewish sociology of culture (although not unique phenomenon in the American movie history, since something similar happened to the Black Americans – at least on the movie screen.)