UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

The Human Chameleon. Hybrid Jews in Cinema

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THE HUMAN CHAMELEON
HYBRID JEWS IN CINEMA

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT
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Summary

This research explores the seditious potential of hybrid Jewish figures in cinema, based on certain thinkers of post WWII French philosophy, feminist and postcolonial theories, and traditional Jewish texts, which in different ways point to a reevaluation of the "chameleon Jew" in positive terms.

While the films discussed in this project come from various places and periods (from the 1920s to recent years), they all represent Jewish chameleon characters that are transformed into other identities. Each film discussed here relates to another face of the Jewish chameleon and to different theoretical questions that are raised by this figure.

The first chapter, "The Jewish Chameleon", is dedicated to Zelig as the quintessential chameleon Jew, an incredibly multi-shaped Jewish figure which prefigures many of the Jewish characters that are discussed in the following chapters. The second chapter, "The Jewish Chameleon in Nazi Cinema", deals with the appearance of the chameleon Jew in the Nazi propaganda films. The third chapter, "The Jewish Nazi", explores the theme of Jewish figures who become (or pretend to become) Nazis. The fourth and fifth chapters, "Muscle Jews in Diaspora Denial" and "Hassidism in the Wild West", explore the image of the traditional Jewish man of the diaspora as a subject of cultural hybridity, gender ambiguity and Jewish interbreeding with genre cinema. The final two chapters (six and seven), titled "Jewish Face, Black Mask" and "Jigga Jews", are dedicated to Jewish chameleon figures that turned "black".