

Michelle Lupisan
SPAN325
Instructor Zielina
Journal #3

The Official Story

This Argentinian film is a great portrayal of what times were like during the Dirty War. Leftists were captured, tortured, and even murdered. Families were torn apart, and children were separated from their parents and illegally adopted. Cruelties such as these can be seen in this film. The main character, Alicia, begins to question the adoption of her daughter when she has a talk with her best friend, Ana. Ana was one of the people who was captured and tortured, but survived and escaped. When her and Alicia catch up, she tells her of the things she went through in captivity, and how there were children who were taken from their parents. This leads Alicia to question what happened to Gabby's real parents.

Although Alicia is a school teacher, she is actually very ignorant to things that are going on around her. This is because she is part of the middle class, and most of them did not know about the horrible things that were occurring in Argentina at the time, such as illegal adoptions and torturing. Thus, she often argues with her students who try to show her the events going on around them. However, once she becomes curious about Gabby's parents, she starts to open her eyes to the cruelty around her.

I enjoyed watching the character development of Alicia, from unaware and close-minded, to a more curious and open-minded person, trying to find Gabby's true parents because she didn't want them to live not knowing where their daughter was. I also think her decision to leave at the end of the film was smart, because her husband seemed very selfish and thought only of his position. I would, however, would like to know what happened to Gabby, since the film ended abruptly with Alicia leaving the home, and didn't explain what happened afterwards.

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All About My Mother

This film is full of many different themes, ranging from motherhood, to prostitution, homosexuality, identity, and the weakening of patriarchal order. In this film, the main character Manuela raises her son Esteban as a single mother, showing the strength and the maternal role. Manuela's maternal role continues even after her son passes away, when she goes to Barcelona and meets Rosa. Manuela nurses Rosa, who is pregnant, and allows her to stay in her home and takes care of her more than Rosa's actual mother does.

Manuela's return to Barcelona also introduces other themes of sexuality and prostitution, as we can see through the character Agrado, a transvestite prostitute, and very good friend of Manuela. This film does a good job of presenting how homosexuality and transgender-ism are not monstrous things, and we can see that through the character Agrado. Though she is a transgender, she is very clever and warm character who cares much for her friends.

Another issue that is addressed in this film is sexually transmitted disease. The character Lola is a transgender who is the father of both Manuela and Rosa's child, and has contracted HIV. It is revealed in the film that Rosa has also contracted it from him, which eventually leads to her death after her child is born.

This film addresses a lot of subjects that come off as controversial. However, it shows that although some things like transgender-ism and homosexuality may be portrayed negatively by society, people should re-consider their opinion on these subjects.

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The Headless Woman

This film from Argentina is a mystery that involves themes like insanity and guilt. The main character, Veronica runs over something in the road, which appears to be an animal, yet she is concerned that she hit a person. When it is revealed that a body had been found in the canal, the people around her try to erase evidence that would lead to her being the suspect of a hit and run. It's also revealed later that one of the worker boys from the beginning of the film didn't show up to work, which makes the idea of a hit and run more plausible. In spite of this, Veronica does not want to think she is responsible for the incident. She then forces herself to forget what happened, and actually ends up believing that she didn't do it.

This idea can be representative of how Argentina was in the past. During the Dirty War, many people went missing and died, yet a lot of the people in Argentina were unaware of it, or simply ignored what was happening around them. This is similar to what Veronica did. She knew she committed a crime, yet she didn't want to take responsibility for it. Similarly, people in Argentina were silent as dissidents disappeared and were tortured.

Another important thing to note is the separation of the light-skinned upper class and the dark-skinned working class. In this film we can see the big gap between the two classes in Argentina. Argentinian people tried to deny their Indian roots, and claimed that they are "only white". Because of this, the separation between light and dark, and upper and lower class is very apparent.

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Central Station

This film set in Brazil deals with themes of companionship, family, and loyalty. The main character Dora embarks on an unexpected journey with orphaned boy Josue as he searches for his father who he's never met before. Dora makes money at the Rio Central Station by writing letters for people. From this, we can see the problem with illiteracy in Brazil.

Also, there are people at the station hunting for children, in hopes to sell their organs on the black market. This makes it dangerous for Josue when his mother dies and he has no home to return to. Although Dora helps him by taking him to her house, she soon betrays him by selling him to an adoption racket. When she hears the dangers of the adoption racket however, she decides to go save Josue, and the two end up going together to find his father.

There are many times along the way where Dora tries to abandon him and go back to Rio, yet the two always find their way back to each other. In the end, they end up becoming close companions. This is especially seen during the scene where they cooperate to make money by letter writing, and celebrate afterwards by taking photos together.

Though they do not find the father, they come to the home of Josue's half-brothers, where Dora decides it would be best for him to stay. Her tears in the final scene as she writes her letter to Josue show how close the two have become, and how she has evolved from a harsh, cynical woman to one who cares for Josue and empathizes with his desire to meet his father.

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Hour of the Star

This Brazilian film focuses on the poverty stricken part of society. This is portrayed through the main character, Macabea. She is an orphan living with relatives, and works as a typist for little pay, and lives a very poor life. Her life of poverty has also led to her lack of education. Not only that, but she is also lacking in many other aspects, such as skill, looks, and common sense. She is very simple minded, and often called ugly by others.

She meets a man named Olimpico who she likes to call her boyfriend, but he acts far from it. Whenever she asks questions he scolds her. When she says a fact she learned from the radio he calls her a liar. Not only that, but he leaves her to try and court her coworker and friend, Gloria.

With a character such as Macabea, the viewer can't help but feel sympathy. She is mistreated by the people around her, and none of them hesitate to insult her by calling her ugly or unskilled. When we see this, we sympathize for her. I think this is a commentary on the poverty in Brazil, and how others should take into consideration the problems that stem from poverty, such as lack of education.

The film also has a very ironic ending. Though Macabea has lived a sad, lonely life, she meets a fortune teller who tells her everything will turn around and she will marry a rich foreigner. However, once leaving the fortune teller's home, she has hit by a car driven by the very foreigner she envisioned she would marry. This is a very surprising ending, and I'm sure most viewers did not see it coming. In the end, Macabea lived a sad life with no happy ending.

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Black Orpheus

Black Orpheus is a Brazilian film that focuses around love, loss, and is based off the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. It also shows the annual festival of Brazil called the Carnival. The viewer gets a taste of what Carnival is like with all the dancing and performances in this film. These scenes are very lively and enjoyable to watch. However, though a romance flourishes between Orpheus and Eurydice who comes to visit, the two meet a tragic end.

I think a big theme in this film is loss and death. Throughout the whole film, Eurydice is followed by a skeleton-like figure who symbolizes death. She even states that she believes “he is trying to kill her”. Towards the end, he eventually corners her on a power line, where she is ironically killed by Orpheus who turned on the power and electrocuted her. Now, his loved one is in the hands of Death. Orpheus has difficulty believing that Eurydice is dead, and retrieves her body so they can run away together. However, he comes across his vengeful wife Mira, who throws a stone to his head, leading him to fall down the mountain. Now, he and Eurydice have both been taken by Death.

This film illustrates the cycle of love and loss. Orpheus fell quickly for Eurydice, and the two quickly begin a romance despite of Orpheus’ recent marriage to Mira. However, we learn that these sorts of things cannot always last, and must come to an end. This “end” is symbolized by Death, portrayed by the skeleton character. He eventually leads Eurydice to her end, which leads also to the death of her lover Orpheus. The last scene portrays this “end” perfectly, with the image of Orpheus and Eurydice fallen at the bottom of the mountain.

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Journal #1

Los Olvidados

This film directed by Luis Bunuel depicts the struggles of children living in poverty in Mexico at the time. The children in the film either have to work to survive, or become delinquents who commit crimes. For example, El Jaibo, who had just escaped from jail, robs innocent people, and even murders another boy. The images are violent and hard to watch, but they are very real and show the cruel reality that these children were living in.

Another factor that adds to the realism is the fact that Bunuel didn't hire any professional actors for this film. All the children in the film were actual children from the street, which makes the film a lot more genuine. Although it is a low budget film, the realistic scenes and characters leave a very big impression on the viewer. Thus, this film is renowned around the world.

Since this film was so full of violence, it was a little difficult to watch. However, it is important to watch it because it portrays the cruel living conditions for the children in Mexico. Bunuel does a good job of combining surrealistic scenes with real characters to make a point of the difficulty for children who grow up in poverty.

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Journal #2

Strawberry and Chocolate

This Cuban film directed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea portrays the struggles of living as a homosexual during the Cuban Revolution. It deals with themes of politics, love, and friendship. Through the homosexual character Diego, we see the criticism towards the Castro regime. Gutierrez is making a statement of the difficulty of being a homosexual in Cuba. David, a Marxist, is originally sent by his friend to Diego's house to spy on him. Although David is open about his sexuality with David, when he goes out in public he keeps it a secret. This is portrayed in the scene when he takes Nancy to the hospital and claims to be her husband. This scene along with Diego's criticism of the Cuban government depicts the difficulty of living as a homosexual in Cuba at the time.

Another theme that can be seen in the film is that of friendship. In the beginning, David is simply spying on Diego because his friend is suspicious of him. It is clear that he isn't comfortable being around Diego, but when he sees the books and art around his house, he becomes intrigued and wants to come back. Over the course of the film, David starts to come to Diego of his own will, to hear his stories and learn from him. In this way, the two develop a strong friendship that is unexpected by the viewer.

Alea does a good job at depicting life in Cuba, while also creating an enjoyable story to watch. In my opinion, it was interesting to watch the development between Diego and David, and see the change from two people with secret incentives, to two friends who truly trusted each other.

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Journal #3

Bitter Sugar

Bitter Sugar is another Cuban film with lots of political and social themes and criticism. It revolves around the main character Gustavo, who is a Communist that supports the Cuban Revolution. However, as the movie progresses, he starts to lose his faith in the government. The scholarship he was promised is never given to him, and he becomes disillusioned with the communist regime that he once supported. In this way, Bitter Sugar can be seen as propaganda against the Cuban Revolution.

This film also clearly portrays the social issues in Cuba at the time. There is an influx of tourism, and while the value of the American dollar grows strong, the peso becomes weaker. Because of this, the Cuban people are forced out of their real jobs and are lured into jobs that will pay more money. We see this with Gustavo's father who would rather play piano at a hotel for tourists than be a psychiatrist, and with Gustavo's lover Yolanda who has to sell her sell in order to make money.

Another important aspect this film addresses is the underground rock scene in Cuba. Gustavo's younger brother, Bobby, is part of this scene, where many youths try to make a statement against the Cuban government. They do this by injecting themselves with the AIDS virus, whereupon they are put into sanitariums. These sanitariums, however, have better living conditions than the average Cuban home, which is the message the youths are trying to get across. This film does a good job of portraying this social issue, as well as the other issues of Cuba at the time.

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Guantanamera

This film, also by Tomas Gutierrez Alea, is a comedy that shows life in Cuba during the “special period”, the time when Cuba ended its relationship with the Soviet Union. During this time, the Cuban people were starting to question the Communist rule, which I think is represented through the relationship of Georgina and her husband Adolfo. Adolfo is a Communist bureaucrat who is concerned about his money, and Georgina is unhappy and unsatisfied with their marriage. I think Adolfo is representative of the Communist party that still has power, but Georgina is representative of the Cuban people who are starting to question the government and lose interest in it.

This movie also shows the funeral rituals of Cuba, which state that a person should be buried according to their will. Therefore, when Georgina’s aunt, Yoyita, dies, her corpse must be transported from Guantanamo to Havana. Adolfo tries to save money on gas costs by transporting the corpse through multiple vehicles.

The poverty during this “special period” is also displayed in this film. Since Cuba was cut off from the Soviet Union, they were in lack of resources, resulting in a time of poverty. This caused a lot of Cuban people to participate in the black market, as we can see some of the characters do throughout the movie. Although this film is a romantic comedy, Alea does a good job of weaving in his political messages against the Castro party.

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Between Pancho Villa and a Naked Woman

This film from Mexico focuses on gender roles, and portrays the evolution of those roles over time. Adrian, who tries to have a strictly sexual relationship with Gina, represents the machismo role, similar to that of Pancho Villa. He admires Pancho Villa, and is even writing a book about him. Thus, he tries to live in a macho way as Pancho Villa would, by having control over Gina and using her only for his own pleasure.

However, Gina, who wants to settle down and have a real relationship, becomes tired of Adrian always running off and his lack of commitment. Thus, she starts dating a younger man. This shows how the way of thinking of women has changed. Whereas before they would submit to a macho character like Pancho Villa, Gina refuses to submit to Adrian, and moves on with her life. In the final scene, the imaginary Pancho Villa comes to Adrian's side and offers him different tactics when he tries to win Gina back. However, all of these backfire, showing how his machismo thinking is no longer acknowledged by women.

This movie is actually based of a theatrical play, which I think can be seen clearly through the actors' performance. Their performance is very extravagant, and their actions are very big, similar to theatre actors. I think this made it very entertaining to watch, especially the final scene where the Pancho Villa/Adrian tag team kept getting turned down by Gina.

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The Secret of Romelia

This film from Mexico revolves around themes of revenge and gender roles. In the opening scene, Carlos Ramon talks to his servant Castula about revenge, and asks her if she would take revenge on the man who wronged her. To this, she answers that revenge is “only for men”. This can be seen in the way Carlos Ramon took revenge against Romelia’s family by rejecting her after their wedding on the grounds that she was not a virgin.

This shows the power that men had over women during the time. Despite the fact that Romelia was spoiled by her parents, when Carlos Ramon, a man of high status, says she is kicked out of his home, her parents do not argue with his decision, nor do they believe her when she says it’s not true. This is representative of the struggles between gender roles.

In this film, we are also able to see the evolution of women’s status in Mexico. The present scenes of Romelia with her daughter and granddaughters, juxtaposed with Romelia’s flashbacks allow the viewer to compare and contrast the role of women during different time periods. Whereas Romelia was very sheltered and ruled by men during her youth, her daughter and granddaughters act more freely, as we can see by the daughter’s divorce and the granddaughters’ smoking and such.