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### Movie Review: "The Official Story"

The film "The Official Story", directed by Luis Puenzo and released in 1985, was a fictional account of the results of the "Dirty War" and the *los desaparecidos* of Argentina. I chose this film because of its emotional representation of a modern time period that the people and the country dealt with and continue to bare scars of to this day. Despite its fictional storyline and characters, the overall event did happen and gives the world an emotional view while we watch one woman challenge her perspectives about her country and how history is written.

Within the political and historical education, I think there is a deep message that the end does not justify the means. Specifically in this film the husband's commitment to his wife's happiness by buying a child deprives a different mother with a loving husband her child own child. There is also the broader political consequences of the husband's acts in the government "for the good of the country" while oppressing subversives and innocents. But I feel that the emotional message at the end of the film was what really illustrated the director's message, both in a broad and personal sense. After experiencing domestic violence, the wife left, heart broken and distrustful, but irrevocably changed. So too was the country. The country endured violence, oppression, and grief as politicians ruled with an iron fist. There was no trust for the government, but fear. Was it really worth capturing all of those people, who could have instead kept working for the good of the country, be it dictatorship or liberation? In both cases, they were changed forever, never to forget, and perhaps never to forgive.

This film was another great example of taking horrific events from the textbook and giving it a whole new emotional dimension. While the film focused on historical events in Argentina, similar instances were briefly discussed in previous classes. Even though it was a fictional storyline, this film ties into the Military Regime and how the “dirty war” might have affected middle to upper class citizens in a protected position while the rest of society dealt with the hand that was given to them. The Mothers of the Plaza, as discussed in the textbook, were featured and in fact expanded upon by showing us, the audience, how they banded together and searched records for their lost beloveds. It also showed the surprising strength these women had, who avoided imprisonment by embracing the traditional roles. What this film didn’t show was any actual guerrilla activity and instead focused on coping citizens. This film is relevant to this course because of its historical context and the emotional connection that it brings, but there was also a question of “what is history” vs “what is story” in American and Latin American contexts. This begins to tie into some of the director’s themes of the film. In America we have two separate words that represent two different types of thought. History is strongly emphasized as fact, while story is for moral or entertainment value. As we have been told, in Latin America this is not the case. The same word for history and story lends an interesting interpretation that history can be a story that teaches, that the facts aren’t always correct, but the message is still there.

The film on its own is a great film. The scene craft, the story was all very well done and gave greater meaning to the film than its individual parts. So the only things that I would have liked to see were merely curiosities. What did the boys from the classroom end up doing? Did they become revolutionaries? They were brash, bold, and brave, so how did they fair in the

changing political climate? Also, the ending was beautifully done and bittersweet which is a good way to make an impact on someone. Still, there is a part of me that wishes to see how Gaby and her mother lived after leaving. How were relations with Gaby's blood-grandmother? I like to imagine life improved even as it got worse.

Even if someone wasn't interested in Argentina or its history, the story set in a more modern time, questions the status quo of society. The characters themselves lend themselves to real living people that you empathize with. It opens you up to all that is good and bad in humanity. There is in fact no one I wouldn't suggest watching this film, except for age restrictions, complexity of feeling and situations.

I am sure there are people in the world that would agree with the husband's actions, either as a husband or as a politician. So they might view this movie with frustration of not representing the other side. And men might view this film differently from women, as the husband tries to protect his family, perhaps the male audience had similar feelings. That is not to say women might not. But there is that sense of a mother might relate to the child's blood-mother's sorrow of not having a child. Culturally speaking, I feel that this film would mostly work well regardless of one's culture, with of course a few exceptions. The story is one of humanity, not just an Argentinean family.

This film once again gave life to text on paper. The emotion connection I got from this movie allowed me to better relate to the regions suffering like this through the story of a family. It will also help me remember these particular events in Argentina's history and how that has shaped society since. It is a common theme in Latin America; Argentina is not alone in this respect.

Reviewing this movie has made me think about what sort of messages the director portrayed, which I usually internalize subconsciously and do not think about it consciously or in an enlightening manner. This review made me realize that there can be dual message seen in the movie, on a small, family, human scale, but also the bigger picture, the whole country or even bigger than that. Because of his message, it seems safe to say he did not agree with the military rule of that time, but was tactful in presenting his argument through the inclusion of love and relationships, making it more than a critical documentary. The entire story between the husband and wife is a metaphor for the political situation at that time in Argentina. While I am no expert on the styles of that time period, it seemed that the filmmakers put a lot of effort into creating sets and scenes accurate to the feel and time period that it was supposed to be set. It was attention to the little details that really made it seem accurate; the handmade signs, hand stitched bags and scarves, the old bottles.

“The Official Story,” though fictional, dealt with the shifting perspectives and changing realities in the Argentinean people and society. Families tore apart and brought together again, seeking closure; all of this puts the history in an emotional understanding and I hope reminds us to look beyond the official story for the whole story, even if the truth hurts.