Strawberry and Chocolate

This movie was my favorite movie we watched this semester. I was very intrigued by the history and struggles that occurred in Cuba in the late 70s early 80s. It is a part of history that is little known to the general public in the United States, I think because of the embargo on Cuba. Because the protagonist is gay in this film, it is always a very interesting perspective on the social issues occurring in Cuba. This film goes along with the 2nd and 3rd learning outcome because it deals with government intrusion on peoples’ private lives. The lack of privacy and freedom of expression is a very clear theme because of the oppressive government. People were not allowed to be whom they wanted and a gap was created between the people. Those who were leftist and rightist politically segregated themselves from each other because of a lack of understanding. David is seen as a threat the to communist cause by some university students and another boy, Diego, is used to spy on David to see what his plans are. It was beautiful to see a boy like Diego who had worked so hard to become a university student learn more from the outside world. He had a preconception of what being gay meant and making a friend like David showed him that people are people no matter what their orientation is. Their friendship blossomed and the intrusion of government could not stop that from happening. This film gives us an insight on the LGBT issue that is still so controversial today. The communist government would not suppress David, who is man as confident as they come. His beliefs would not be drowned out because they were not acceptable to the government. Diego met someone who would change his life and teach him that being ourselves is the most important part of being a human being.

Havana

This film gives us an intriguing and hauntingly beautiful insight on what it is like to live in Havana instead of vacation there. We get a first look at a few of the lives of people living in the broken buildings in Havana. My first reaction was the eerie beauty that the buildings hold. The architecture and uniqueness to the buildings makes them beautiful, but they are all run down and falling apart and it’s a sad sight to see. Worse part is, people live their lives in these buildings. The government has put no effort into renovating these building so several of them are on the verge of collapse, whilst people continue to live in them. This film shows us actual real people struggling to find their place in their own country. Most don’t work because jobs aren’t being created. There are several jobs waiting to be created, specifically when it comes to dealing with the buildings. People have odd hobbies, like taking care of pigeons, to fill their time. The horrid split and difference in the city is striking. These massive resorts and beautiful hotels and beaches waiting for the tourists are a part of Havana the locals cannot and do not enjoy. They are forced to live among ruins without the government paying any attention to their own people. The kinds of living conditions the Cubans in Habana live in creates a feeling of shame among the people. Who can be proud of their own country when their country won’t help out its own people? Yes, maybe the homeless always have a piece of shelter, but who knows when that building will collapse and cause fatalities? A writer in the film goes as far to say that the poetry of the collapsing buildings in the capital is a personification of the eventual collapse of the government. It is a beautiful place to look upon, but it is home to many people and people should not be forced to live that way in their own capital.

Guantanamera

This film was a comedic relief to some of the other harsher films we have been watching. It was an incredibly unique story line as well. I had never heard of such efforts put into transporting people to the place they would like to be laid to rest. As the adventure to lay Aunt Yoyita to rest continues, we get to know about some of the countries issues going on during this time. The Soviet Union had just cut all aid and resources to Cuba, and Cuba began to struggle fiscally. The best example that we see of this is with the protagonist Mariano. He was a successful engineer with the Soviet Union and now he is a truck driver who has a different lady at each stop waiting for him. We learn of a romance between Mariano and currently married Gina. We see the gender roles of each person as well because Gina has an overbearing and controlling husband who has political aspirations. He is unkind compared to the funny and romantic Mariano and immediately the audience picks a side to root for. Gina struggles with her role as a woman as she is clearly being dominated and controlled against her will by her own husband. Gina had just watched her aunt come back to Guantánamo for a visit and fall in love with an old sweetheart of hers. This childhood sweetheart, Cándido, goes on the excursion with the family to lay Yoyita to rest. Gina reflects on the life of her aunt and the life she is currently living and knows that she does not want to live a life full of regret. Another great theme in this film is that we are shown the strength of the US dollar in comparison to the Cuban money. People don’t want the Cuban money because it is not worth very much. The dollar is a much more sought after currency.

The greatest part about this film is that it is showing a hope that Cuba has. There is comedy and old loves starting anew at every corner and with these hopes a new hope regarding Cuba is created. This silly issue of how to transport the dead to the family plots is a ridiculous notion but one that can be an issue. And with Adolfo representing the government and the way he makes the trip much more difficult than necessary just because he can is a great representation of how the government treats the people of Cuba.

Bitter Sugar

This film tests the beliefs of a man who has wholeheartedly believed in the revolution and communism. We meet Gustavo with his beautiful girlfriend Yolanda and we find out that Gustavo wants to study in Prague to further his degree. He believes in communism and the changes that will come with the revolution, but these beliefs are tested when Gustavo learns of many issues his family is dealing with. First his father is a psychiatrist who doesn’t do his practice because he can make a lot more money by playing piano at a nearby resort. This is disgraceful to his father and to Gustavo, but people have to do what they must to survive. The most tragic story we are faced with is the story of Gustavo’s brother, Bobby. Bobby is a rocker and therefore causes a lot of trouble with his group with the authorities. They feel so oppressed and that they are out of options for freedom when it comes to the government that Bobby and his group of rockers do something extreme. They inject themselves with the HIV/AIDS disease. They videotape themselves doing this and it creates frenzy in the family and on the island. This terribly extreme and irreversible choice Bobby made is an example of how caged, trapped and oppressed he must feel and the only way to get away from the oppression of Cuba is by dying.

As an audience, we learn that local Cubans are not allowed to go onto some beaches and hang out at the bars purely because they are Cuban and not tourists and therefore probably don’t have the money, or the all desired US dollar. We see Gustavo’s girlfriend, who dreams of moving to Miami, become an escort in order to receive the riches from wealthy tourists that she so desires.

Time and time again, Gustavo is tried and tested with his belief in this government that has ruined his family over and over again. Because of the government’s actions and intrusions his father cannot be a respected doctor, his brother will die for his freedom, and his girlfriend will cheat and leave him for a different life in Miami.

The way this movie ends is a perfect example of how desperate times lead to desperate measures. After his whole understanding of his world collapses on him, he does a drastic thing by trying to assassinate Castro. He is caught in the trap of tyranny and the only way out that he sees is by ending the revolution himself.

Between Pancho Villa and a Naked Woman

This movie deals with the gender wars that occur commonly in the machista views. The story is a simple one about a man and woman who are in love and she is ready to move forward with the relationship and he is not and runs away basically. The underlying themes of this film are what really make the film intriguing. Pancho Villa is seen gallanting around during war and he is depicted as terribly machista and is even really horrible to his own mother. Pancho Villa is also the man’s machista conscience as he tried to give Adrian advice on his relationship.

The message of the movie is about how men think they can do whatever they want whenever they want with the woman they are supposedly in love with. Women get tired of the same relationship and just having sex all the time. We naturally want to have children and continue moving our relationships further along during life. Men have a tendency to run away after having sex, since they’re primitive brain function is only to replicate themselves and not to raise families like women. Gina makes a stand in this movie by telling her lover that she is done with this static relationship and that they should get married and have a family. After Adrian disappears for 3 months and is all of sudden ready to be with his lover, she has not sat around and waited for him.

We women are not for men to use when they will. They cannot come back and “get us” when they want. They cannot “win” us back because we are not trophies for them to have. This film is a gross depiction of what the machista culture does to a woman and how a woman has to be strong enough to recognize that they are not objects that men can have whenever they want.

The Forgotten Ones

This controversial film is another example of the great works by Luis Buñuel. It is an important perspective dealing with the dehumanization of people living in poverty. To these boys who are living in the slums and have lots of time to waste, they are pulled into gangs. A gang member who was just released from prison comes back with a vengeance towards those who put him in jail. He comes back to the gang and ends up killing someone who ratted him out and another boy, Pedro, was a witness to the scene.

Pedro is the sign of hope in this film and we watch him struggle with overcoming the pressure of the gang. He is forced to do things and go along with the horrible acts of petty theft that the gang is known for. He comes from a family with little to nothing and his mother thinks he is nothing but trouble and rejects her own son. He is without help until he is sent away and a teacher takes him under his wing.

We see these children and teenagers treating each other with little regard as well as others. They pick on the weak and disabled to rob from, they treat young girls as objects to do what they will with. It is a horrible depiction of what poverty can force people into doing. When people cannot see the options the world gives them, they learn to survive by stepping on top of others instead of striving for a new future. It was a film that criticized the Mexican government and was not widely accepted at first, especially since Buñuel is not a Mexican himself.

I believe the theme of dehumanization in poverty is a universal theme that should always be addressed and it is a great piece of work done by Buñuel.