



1-28-2015

Partisan

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Recommended Citation

Ramji, Rubina (2015) "Partisan," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol19/iss1/12>

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Partisan

Abstract

This is a film review of *Partisan* (2015), directed by Ariel Kleiman.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



Partisan
(2015)
Directed by Ariel Kleiman

Gregori (Vincent Cassel) is a charming man, a loving man, who has escaped the trappings and violence of the world and invites women who are in dire circumstances to come and live in his compound. He finds these women in maternity wards, alone, abused and faced with the burden of raising a new infant. They live communally, and Gregori loves these children as his own. His favorite is the first child to come and live with him, Alexander (Jeremy Chabriel). His mother, Susanna (Florence Mezzara) becomes pregnant with Gregori's baby when Alexander is 11. In order to survive in the compound, to feed the fifteen children living there, Gregori maintains one contact to the outside world; Uncle Charlie. Charlie brings Gregori assignments to complete, for which he is paid in cash. These assignments are assassinations, and the assassins are the children being raised in the compound. Alexander is the best of them.

In the compound, Gregori teaches the children how to follow the rules. "Rules are important. Without rules we become like them." When Alexander disobeys a simple rule, Gregori tells him that he is untrustworthy. Following the rules is required so that they will become ideal role models for the younger children.

When a new young boy, Leo, enters the compound with his mother and infant child, the external world seeps into the compound and Alexander becomes more aware of questioning authority. Rather than blindly doing the bidding of Gregori, Alexander begins to realize that the actions of shooting a person lead to deadly consequences. Leo does not accept Gregori's rules or authority; he questions Gregori, something no one does in the compound. Leo, his mother and her infant disappear after an incident where Leo defies Gregori. Alexander begins to realize that Gregori himself is untrustworthy. The idyllic world that Alexander has known is now shattered by his own clarity—he sees the truth of Gregori, and comes to understand that not all authority is good. In the end, Alexander much choose the love he has for his mother and new baby brother Tobias over the rulership and tranquil life he has led in the compound.

Partisan leads us through Alexander's awakening, his keen interest in the world and the realization that not all havens and authority figures have the best intentions; sometimes they manipulate naiveté and try to instill a false sense of safety. In the end, children must come to trust themselves and their own consciences when faced with authority figures that claim to have their best intentions at heart. Although Gregori is not a "religious" figure, his form of charisma and authority help us understand why people join new religious movements and why many eventually leave. There is no Garden of Eden, and violence is everywhere.