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Rendition

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Rendition

Abstract

This is a review of *Rendition* (2007).

Rendition (2007) is a bleak and disturbing tale of what can happen to a family in a world driven by the imperative "war on terror" for the protection of "freedom and democracy" in a post 9/11 America. Egyptian-born American chemical engineer, Anwar El-Ibrahimi (Omar Metwally) catches a flight from Cape Town, South Africa to Chicago after attending a conference but never reaches home. His very pregnant American wife, Isabella (Reese Witherspoon), unable to explain his absence, contacts an old boyfriend (Peter Sarsgaard) who is a Senator's Aide for help.

However these inquiries meet a stony wall of silence and secrecy on the grounds of national security and politicians distance themselves from the case because any rummaging into the affair is a political liability. Tortuously it becomes clear that Anwar, suspected in connection with a recent North African terrorist bombing, has been kidnapped by the CIA on orders from terrorism chief, Corinne Whitman (Meryl Streep).

Meanwhile Anwar is imprisoned and tortured in a secret detention facility in somewhere in a North African country by the security head, Abasi Fawal (Yigal Naor) who is portrayed as a callous and ruthless henchman fit for purpose. His interrogation and torture is overseen by CIA analyst Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal), who is embarking on his very first interrogation. Anwar is stripped naked, thrown into a coffin-like cell when not tortured, whacked, water-boarded,

electrocuted and strangled to force an admission of guilt. The brutalities of torture are haunting and repulsive. Anwar's pleading that he is an American goes unheard while his Muslim name and Egyptian origin are used to link him to all sorts of possible terrorist network given he was an engineer and therefore potential bomb maker.

Interwoven within this narrative are two linked local tales. The tough guy Abasi, a hardy patriarch, is plagued with family problems. His rebellious daughter falls in love with young man whose father and brother had been tortured and killed by Abasi's security apparatus. She runs away from home and spends some time with him. He is a budding artist who is being groomed by a cell of Islamists in a local mosque to prepare for a suicide mission to take Abasi out in revenge. Abasi is saved by fortuitous circumstances when the young man blows himself up and later discovers that his daughter was in the vicinity trying to convince her boyfriend not pull the trigger on the bomb. This part of the film stretches credibility as it moves across time frame, and the film itself follows a tight chronology that keeps the viewer on edge.

When Anwar confesses to save his life under intense torture, Freeman finds upon investigation that the names given by Anwar are those of his football team mates and worthless intelligence. Realising that he has the wrong person and by now conscience stricken, Freeman acts atypically for a CIA operative by smuggling

Anwar out of the detention center and sets him on a boat to Europe with false identity papers. Anwar, tortured in the name of national security through this horrible process of extreme rendition, finally arrives home to be reunited with this family.

The ruthless character of Abasi, the obdurateness of Anwar, the moral ambivalence and signs of humanity of Freeman, the unbending certainties of Whitman, the opaqueness of congressmen and the confusion of the young man and woman are well portrayed by the actors. The contrast between the well lighted corridors in Washington and the squares and streets of a North African city are stark and poetic.

Spanning continents and cultures, the film captures the politics of the US led "war on terror" that brutalizes individuals and institutions. This film should make one angry and convince people that torture and rendition is never acceptable under any conditions. Abandoning the due process of law poses a greater threat to society than the threat of terrorism. Although a hard movie to watch, Rendition raises serious questions about the meaning of freedom and the consequences of abusing one's human rights.