

**USING *FILM SOCIETIES* IN HUMAN RIGHTS
EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN AN UNDER-
GRADUATED COURSE
IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
IN BRAZIL**

*A UTILIZAÇÃO DE CINECLUBES NA EDUCAÇÃO EM
DIREITOS HUMANOS: UM ESTUDO DE CASO
ENVOLVENDO UM CURSO DE RELAÇÕES
INTERNACIONAIS NO BRASIL*

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Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate film society as a didactic instrument of human rights education in an undergraduate course in International Relations in Brazil. Based on a case study carried out at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG), film society is taken as a very efficient way of arousing students' interest in human rights when properly planned, especially in a traditionally elitist career focused on issues such as international trade and negotiation. On the one hand, film exhibition captures attention of students and induces an exercise of alterity. Therefore, it is a useful activity to deal with the complexity of human rights. In addition, debates and discussions held after films exhibitions proved to be a privileged

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space, both to consolidate the importance of theme and also to encourage the reading of indicated bibliography.

Keywords

International Relations education, Human Rights, Film Society.

Resumo

Este trabalho busca avaliar o cineclubismo como uma ferramenta didática da educação em direitos humanos em um curso de graduação em Relações Internacionais do Brasil. Partindo de um estudo de caso realizado na Universidade Federal do Rio Grande, os autores concluíram que a atividade cineclubista, sendo adequadamente planejada, é um meio bastante eficiente de despertar o interesse dos alunos sobre os direitos humanos em uma carreira tradicionalmente elitista, focada especialmente no comércio e negociação internacionais. Os resultados mostraram, a exibição dos filmes prende a atenção dos estudantes e induz a um exercício de alteridade, sendo uma atividade útil para lidar com a complexidade dos direitos humanos. Além disso, os debates e discussões realizados após a exibição dos filmes demonstraram ser um espaço privilegiado, tanto para consolidar a importância da temática como também para fomentar a leitura dos textos indicados.

Palavras-chave

Ensino de Relações Internacionais, Direitos Humanos, Cineclubismo.

INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate education in International Relations (IR) in Brazil began in the 1970s with the purpose of training senior executives to act in strategic sectors for the country, such as international trade, public policy and diplomacy. Since its birth, this career has been part of cultural and economic elite, which justifies increasing interest among young students. With the expansion of undergraduate courses since 2000, a reflection on IR's teaching methodology and curriculum becomes quite convenient.

Taking as a premise, human rights education is indispensable for internationalist career. Such importance stems from needing of a more humanistic formation, attentive to the importance of peaceful conflict resolution, tolerance, migration, transitional justice and others. In addition, introducing these themes in classroom implies a rupture with elitist tradition of IR's education in Brazil

and its emphasis to train bureaucratic staff for government and human resources for large transnational corporation.

Opposing IR's mainstream education, a challenge arises. What is the best way to deal with human rights in classroom, arousing student's interest? Specialized literature has increasingly indicated *film society* among many possible alternatives. Film society is an activity which combines cinematographic appreciation with an educational experience. It is not a mere exhibition of movies, but appropriation of cinema in its various dimensions as a tool of learning and critical reflection.

Aiming to evaluate film society in human rights education, a case study was carried out. A group of IR undergraduate students at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG), in Rio Grande do Sul State, voluntarily participated of an outreach activity entitled *Latin America's transitional justice Seminar*, a film society experience devoted to transitional justice and human rights' enforcement. Semi-structured questionnaires were used, containing objective questions about the activity as well as open-ended questions where students could freely express their opinions. Research problems can be synthesized from two questions: (1) do films stimulate student's immersion within academic discussion on human rights? (2) Do the use of films in classroom inhibit or encourage student to read recommend bibliography?

This paper is divided into three sections. First deals with IR's teaching in Brazil, its main curricular guidelines and the role of human rights, also reporting some film society experiences. Subsequently, case study and methods are presented. In the last part, main results are shown and discussed and also final conclusions are drawn.

1. FILM SOCIETY MOVEMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS' EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

IR's education is relatively recent in Brazil. The first undergraduate course appeared only in 1974 at the University of Brasilia, and it was conceived to train staff related to Brazilian's internationalization (Lessa, 2005). IR's alumni shall contribute to an independent foreign policy, away from binary logic of Cold War and able to attract partnerships to Brazil, which suffered deeply with oil crisis. IR professional would work in strategic sectors of intelligence, diplomacy and international trade, in public offices (embassies, consulates, ministries of defense and justice), international organizations and private sector, especially in transnational corporations. IR became an elitist career, attracting young students willing to find a well-paid and socially recognized job. Enrollment rate is much lower than demand, especially in public universities, which leads to strong competition (Miyamoto, 2003). In a short period of time, this career has acquired a social status similar to traditional professions such as medicine, law and engineering.

In the epistemological field, IR's curriculum is characterized by a deep interdisciplinarity. Genealogy of undergraduate courses in Brazil began with study of Brazilian's diplomacy history, which was the first field of research (Santos, 2005). Later, economists, political scientists and lawyers played an important role, introducing definitely education and research of IR in Brazil (Vigevani et al., 2014).

Since the 2000s, IR undergraduate courses had grown expressively, achieving more than ninety in the whole country. IR's professional practice is not regulated, and those who completed a major in IR do not have any legal prerogatives or even a code of conduct. Regarding curriculum, Brazilian Ministry for Education does not impose any restriction or indicate mandatory courses. Therefore, Brazilian universities count with an almost unrestricted autonomy, freely choosing the content of curriculum.

IR's education has become a fertile *field* disputed by diverse areas of knowledge, such as history, economy, political science, law

and others. Taking *field* as a symbolic space of dispute for control and legitimacy of produced goods (Pereira, 2015) each of them is trying to uphold its own representations in the curriculum and also in job positions in universities and colleges.

Several examples illustrate multidisciplinary nature of IR in Brazil. The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), one of the main research agencies, defines IR as a *human science*, linked to the subarea of Political Science (CNPq, 2016). At the Federal University of Rio Grande, however, IR is part of Law School, an *applied social science*. On the other hand, IR's undergraduate course of the Federal University of Santa Catarina belongs to the Department of Economics.

Any attempt to create homogeneity in IR's curriculum inevitably ends up by showing this dispute. The Brazilian Association of International Relations (ABRI, 2016) has developed a draft of national curricular guidelines. Although not compulsory, it significantly influences development of new courses. ABRI has suggested the inclusion of the following courses as mandatory: (a) Theory, Epistemology and Methodology of International Relations, (b) International Institutions, (c) Foreign Policy, (d) International Political Economy, e) International Security. Others, such as those related to law, geography, philosophy, foreign languages, sociology are only discretionary.

A preference for Economics and Politics is evident. Most repeated words in ABRI's draft are *politics* (48 times), *security* (19 times), *economics* (11 times), *commerce* (6 times), *trade* (5 times) and *finance* (4 times). Expressions such as *social* and *human rights* appear only twice throughout the whole document.

This asymmetry insinuates how this career is still connected to the same old agenda. Even unintentionally, universities repeat the mindset of the 1970s: to train staff to work in high-paying jobs in public and private sectors. This shapes student's learning and

expectations regarding their role in society and professional performance.

Human rights education is not a compulsory curricular component in many courses. Consequently, its role ends up being peripheral in internationalists' education. Interest and motivation to readings are reduced when compared to more traditional themes like Foreign Policy or International Economics. Arousing human right's attention in an elite career requires high efforts.

Under this scenario, pedagogical techniques diverse from traditional expository model emerge as a viable alternative to improve human rights education in IR. Active pedagogy starts from the idea that students should not be only receivers of information but active subjects engaged in acquiring knowledge, participating proactively during classes (Chakur, 1995).

Use of films as a didactic tool has been highlighted by the so-called active pedagogy. It is undeniable that cinema is one of the most popular and influential types of artistic expression in the world. One of main reasons for such success is certainly connected to fascination of image, with an unparalleled ability to attract attention of general public. Communication through images constitutes a kind of 'universal language that can be understood by people from different origins and age groups' (Martins et al., 2011, p.5).

Film society is a cultural movement which combines cinematographic appreciation with an educational experience. One of the best definitions can be found in Normative Instruction n. 63 of Brazilian Ministry for Culture, which defines film societies and sets standards for eventual public registration. First article states: 'film societies are non-commercial exhibition spaces for diversified national and foreign audiovisual works, which can carry out related activities, such as lectures and debates on audiovisual language'.

Therefore, film society refers to a group of people who come together to appreciate and discuss cinematographic works without aiming any profit. On the other hand, it is worth reminding this activity does not deal with mere exhibition of movies, but rather it promotes the appropriation of audiovisual in all its potentiality. Using films in this sense makes it possible to carry out debates

and activities based on them, seeking to ‘develop a different critical vision, that is, a film society culture that allows to glimpse new ways of seeing the world’ (Martins et al. 2011, 5).

Taking advantage of the sensorial dimension of cinema, dialogues, images and sounds compose a universe to be exploited for pedagogical means, to improve both *aesthetic* (understanding film as an artistic piece of work) and *rational* (capacity of cinema to reveal social and political contexts) dimensions. The use of cinema presupposes ‘something that focuses not only on film analysis, but includes the ability to ‘see’ beyond images and text. It relates to put in question the own modalities of knowledge crystallized in images and discourses conveyed by cinema’ (Silva & Freitas, 2008, p.10).

According to Sales (2015), film societies are entities emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in virtue of cinema’s cultural legitimization process. They ‘feature as main activities spread, research and debate cinema, and contributed also to form critical viewers, aware to social and political surroundings’ (Sales, 2015, p. 1). Today, film society movement is increasingly common in schools and universities, playing an important role to democratize access to culture, popularization of cinematographic art, and in diffusion of works with no room in commercial exhibitions (Butruce, 2003).

In the field of international relations’ research, there are several studies about effectiveness of films as a pedagogical tool. A paper from *Asian Pacific University* presents quite satisfactory results concerning films in class. According to this study, movies allow students to absorb information in a more interactive and multidirectional way, benefiting significantly from both professor’s comments and film debates. Students demonstrated more engagement in these activities when comparing to traditional expositive lectures. Most enjoyed the experience and had the impression of improving knowledge and objective understanding of less complex subjects.

From the point of view of professors, discussions among students were a good way to stimulate themes such as cultures, societies and countries, especially in multiethnic environments (Takekawa et al., 2011).

As can be observed, films can be a useful instrument for human rights education in IR's courses. Many factors must be taken into account, starting with the choice of films and their relation to courses' content. Planning is also essential to put in practice a true film society activity (discussion, debates, contextualization, aesthetic appreciation, etc.), in order to avoid film exhibition becomes a mere entertainment.

Besides, there is still a prejudice in using films due to a supposed lack of scientific evidence. Films are not always adequate; some parts could be a complete waste of time in contributing directly to understanding of subject. For international policy learning, films focus on one aspect and neglect others, often providing a common sense or Eurocentric views (Engert & Spencer, 2009), which would prevent development of Brazilian or Latin American critical thought in international relations (Vizentini, 2005).

Authors also point out disadvantages and risks that may compromise learning of international relations. When it comes to analyze concepts with a deeper complexity in international politics, films do not seem to have a great effect on learning. In addition, there is a serious risk that film activity occupies so much time in classroom leaving no room for discussion. Another problem involves size of classes; in large classrooms (between 100 and 200 students), most end up assuming a passive posture, which is why film society is recommended only for small groups (Takekawa, 2011).

Engert and Spencer (2009) point other advantages in their research on cinema and international politics. First, students are used to and often demonstrate skills to deal with visual material; so it would make all sense to take advantage of skills they already have to help them in other areas. There are also clinical reasons to justify the use of films, since audiovisual works with both halves of brain, making learning easier; at this point, movies serve as a kind of em-

pirical case to be used to decipher more abstract concepts. Films also involve emotions, which contributes to learning process, reducing hierarchies in class and encouraging discussions (Engert & Spencer, 2009).

2. CASE STUDY AND METHODS

The Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG) founded a very different undergraduate course in IR comparing to others in Brazil. FURG is a public and free university, located in the port city of Rio Grande, Rio Grande do Sul State. FURG's IR undergraduate course belongs to the Faculty of Law, however its campus stays in Santa Vitória do Palmar. By being on the border of Uruguay, extreme-south of Brazil, 190 km far from Rio Grande, Santa Vitória do Palmar is a town with a history of poverty and geographic isolation.

The creation of this campus reveals a commitment to social development by bringing higher education to a place traditionally forgotten by government. In addition, in the last decade, FURG's Faculty of Law favored citizenship and social inclusion. The Faculty keeps a pro bono legal aid service for poor population, a Reference Center on Human Rights (CRDH), a Reference Center for Supporting Families in Poverty (CRAF), as well as a Master's Degree Program in Law and Social Justice.

For IR undergraduate course, Faculty highlighted human rights education as ethical and curricular pillars of academic training. In addition to inclusion of mandatory human rights courses in its curriculum, discussion of this subject is widely present, guiding teaching, research and outreach activities.

Although Faculty and curriculum contemplate the importance of human rights education, there is a great difficulty to make it effective. Most students are still immersed in the elitist tra-

dition of career, focused on well-paid government jobs and trade negotiations. Human rights' themes are still regarded in collective imaginary as something quite peripheral. How to draw students' attention to the importance of human rights in an IR course?

Aware of these difficulties, a group of professors approved an outreach project entitled *Film Society: International Relations and Cinema*. This initiative aims to stimulate actions involving movies as a learning tool. It does not mean a passive display of films in the classroom. The purpose of this experiment is not only focused on the aesthetic appreciation provided by the seventh art, but also critical discussion made after exhibitions.

An activity conducted in 2016 was a seminar called *Transitional Justice in Latin America*. This event was conceived as a complementary activity of General Theory of State and Foreign Policy courses, both required in FURG's IR curriculum. A common subject for both courses is constitutional dialogue between courts, also called *transconstitutionalism* of legal orders (Neves, 2014). In other words, it is a matter of assessing whether or not the supreme court of a country is obliged to comply a decision of an international court which the country is a signatory of. Another issue lies in the fact that the Foreign Policy course includes analyses of Brazilian diplomacy during military regime period.

Professors glimpsed here an opportunity to discuss transitional justice and human rights' enforcement. Brazilian situation is quite emblematic on this issue. In 2010, the Federal Supreme Court of Brazil (*Supremo Tribunal Federal - STF*) ruled Amnesty Law could not be revised, so military and other public officials cannot be convicted of political crimes committed during dictatorship. However, few months later the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (*Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos - CIDH*), in *Gomes Lund and others v. Brazil* case, condemned Brazilian government to compensate victims of military regime, affirming that no rule of domestic law, such as amnesty, should prevent government from fulfilling its inalienable obligation to punish crimes against humanity. As can be seen, there is a legal conflict between application of domestic and international law.

IR training requires students to know and evaluate the functioning of international system, which includes international decisions and treaties. In the last decades, study of transitional justice has strengthened, considered as a branch of research focused on how societies deal with the legacy of past human rights violations, mass atrocities and other forms of social trauma (Shelton, 2004). Latin America is part of a unique context in which different national experiences of transitional justice are continuous shared (Sikkink & Walling, 2007), especially by influence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CIDH). Thus, the study of the effectiveness of transitional justice mechanisms in Brazil necessarily involves a broader understanding of Latin American reality.

In order to spread students' reflection on transitional justice, professors used cinema as a didactic tool. It is worth reminding this was a complementary activity, without grade assignment, relying only on voluntary engagement of students. The seminar took place in four meetings during the months of August and September 2016.

First meeting was devoted to the **work plan and to organize the activities**. Three texts were recommended as a support bibliography – STF and CIDH's decisions on Brazilian Amnesty Law and a chapter on transitional justice. In addition, two teams of students were chosen to prepare lectures about military regimes in Argentina and Chile.

Second meeting focused on **Argentine military dictatorship**. Students' lecture lasted for thirty minutes, addressing a chronology of military period and human rights' violations. Soon after, audience watched the movie *Kamchatka* (2002), directed by Marcelo Piñeyro. Finally, there was a conversation about the film, historical context and impressions of the characters.

Third meeting was dedicated to **Chilean dictatorship**. Following the same script, students watched the movie *Colonia* (2015), directed by Florian Gallenberger.

Discussion of transitional justice in Brazil was reserved to the last meeting. Professors mediated a dialogue between and with students about obstacles of Brazilian justice system in condemning public agents, legal controversy over international courts and enforcement of human rights. During this conversation, students were able to compare Brazilian situation with rest of Latin American in a constant and fruitful reflection on films, recalling previous meetings.

At the end of the Seminar, professors invited students to participate in an opinion survey to evaluate what was done. This survey is based on a semi-structured questionnaire, containing objective questions on a *Likert* scale, as well as open-ended questions where students could freely express their opinions. Forms were made available through *E-survey* digital platform. In order to access the file, each student signed an Informed Consent Term (ICT). There was no identification control mechanism, to encourage sincerity in answers. In a total of forty-eight students who participated in at least one activity, twenty-six of them answered the questionnaire on *E-Survey* platform (n = 26).

Empirical research carried out with FURG's students aimed to understand film society experience as a didactic instrument for human rights education in the IR's undergraduate course. Research problems can be synthesized from two questions: (1) do films stimulate student's immersion within academic discussion on human rights? (2) Do the use of films in classroom inhibit or encourage student to read recommend bibliography? These questions allow understanding how the use of movies and the discussions over it captures attention and instigates to think about human rights. A hypothesis is once interest in subject has been aroused, movies also encourage students to read recommended bibliography. Therefore, a more consistent learning becomes easier with critical reflection in classroom.

Qualitative data were decoded through analysis of content, using free software *Weft QDA*. Data decoding was made in an inductive way. Reading answers used line-by-line coding techniques. This initial step generated a list of codes and focused themes, with which following analyzes were carried out.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Questionnaire was structured into three parts. First included a general evaluation of the activity, student's lectures and the role of professors. The second part focused on students' stand on transitional justice and the influence of film society on each one's opinion. The last part inquired about the amount of reading from recommended bibliography.

3.1 Evaluation of activity

Most of the students who answered the questionnaire participated in all activities of film society: presentation of the work plan (26), *Kamchatka* (24), *Colonia* (25) and discussion of bibliography (21). Students' persistence in attending most of the meetings is worth mentioning since the activity was not mandatory and it was carried out during four weeks outside the usual hours of classes. This fact reinforces how much cinema arouses interest and attention of students.

When questioned about what they found of the activity in general terms, 11 students answered *excellent* (57.89%), 7 students answered *very good* (36.84%), 1 student answered *good* (5.26%) and none answered *fair* or *poor*. In addition, 8 students (42.11%) found it *extremely important* to use film society in other undergraduate courses, 9 students found it *very important* (47.37%) and 2 students found it *important* (10.53%). These data show a unanimous approval of film society among all participants.

The best way to understand why film society was so well appraised is to compare it with previous experiences. In fact, for the vast majority of students (87.50%) using films in the classroom was not something new. However, when invited to write about the impressions, responses indicated that film society was different mainly because of its methodology. This reinforces the importance of planning for the success of activity. Comments can be categorized from three main reasons.

First reason is the explanation about historical context of the countries held before the film is shown. These lectures are organized by the students themselves and have numerous advantages. Most evident is the assertion that understanding the context in advance facilitates the understanding of the film, as a student rightly pointed out:

In the Filmclub, lectures of the students before the films were crucial to the basic understanding of the period revealed by the movies. It makes a big difference in relation to movies already shown during other courses, in which we saw the movie and only after we did a work or discussion about. In my view this short presentation 'opens' the mind and our perceptions about the movies (Student 2).

It is worth reminding that this stage was conducted by students themselves. A group of them was responsible for researching the history of military regimes and preparing a brief exposure to colleagues, which was done through the use of images, videos and songs. This initiative of placing the student as an active subject in the learning process undoubtedly composes the success of film society. Taking into account the whole activity was not mandatory, those who prepared lectures did it with utmost interest and commitment. Their work was recognized by others:

It was the best experience I ever had in terms of using cinema both in school and college. The way it was organized, counting with an explanation by colleagues before film exhibition (**they must be con-**

gratulated for the excellent work), this explanation provided a more critical and less romantic view (Student 13).

This stage had in fact a wide acceptance on the part of those involved. 18 students (75%) found initial lectures *extremely important* or *very important*, 6 considered *important* (25%) and none found it *slightly important* or *not important*.

Second reason raised in forms deals with the third part of film society schedule: the debates held immediately after films exhibition. The importance of these discussions is very well illustrated in two comments:

Well, filmclub was a very new experience, because movies that I had watched both in high school and at other occasions, **was simply to watch the movie**, without any debate and it didn't provide us an intellectual experience (Student 8).

Filmclub certainly went way beyond my high school experience, **where movies were simply thrown at us, so that we could understand what was needed only by ourselves**. Therefore, filmclub had an objective and somehow managed to achieve its purposes (Student 5).

Reading carefully comments above, a previous distrust of students is noticed regarding the use of films in classroom. In fact, pedagogical use of cinema can suffer many vices as literature strongly demonstrates (Engert & Spencer, 2009; Takekawa, 2011). If there is no adequate planning and administration, film exhibition ends up by occupying the entire space of class, resting no opportunity for questions, comments or even the possibility of discussing points of view with professors.

So when the student says previous experiences were ‘simply to watch the movie’ (Student 8) or ‘movies were simply thrown at us’ (Student 5), there is a warning to avoid becoming the class a sort of entertainment. Space of discussion *about* and *from* the film is an indispensable element for an activity to be considered a film society. As Senna (2004) rightly reminds us, film society is the ‘most active, collective and pervasive way of accumulating film literacy. It is the most dynamic form of relationship with this culture – if, in addition to watching movies, film society includes in fact **intelligent programming**, historical and critical information about films and the reflection on them’ (p.22).

The primary goal of project realized at FURG is to enable *intelligent programming* generated from criticism and reflection. Critical reflection means thinking beyond obvious and common sense, interpreting and revealing realities. The moment of discussion was a privileged space, since students could learn from diverse points of view. Many questionnaires have pointed this out, but one of them in particular is quite pertinent:

In past activities, teacher plays the movie and just asked for a summary afterwards, **not sharpening our sense about what lies between the lines of the film**. In the filmclub this was possible, **since many showed several faces of interpretation**. Besides, several things went unnoticed by some and were remembered by others, **making a greater instrument of critical knowledge about the film** (Student 21).

Therefore, the Seminar *Transition Justice in Latin America* can be considered a truly film society activity. Since project’s presentation time, students have perfectly understood the purposes, its methodology and thematic. A student wrote ‘filmclub stayed true to proposed discussion, in case Transitional Justice. This choice was a good option not only on its importance **but also because it pleased everyone**, generating comments and debates, keeping students in expectation for next film’ (Student 17).

Adequate planning for film society has potential to create positive expectations, making classroom debates more productive. Numbers reinforce this view. 21 students (87.5%) considered debate conducted by professors *excellent* or *very good*, 3 students (12.5%) considered it *good* and none found it to be *fair* or *poor*.

Lastly, **third reason** refers to aesthetic appreciation of films. This dimension is very dear for the film society movement, since one of its main commitments is with cultural value of film production. To a certain extent, it opposes commercial logic of the film industry, concerned with mass culture of entertainment. While good cultural choices are increasingly restricted, to create new alternative spaces has been necessary. *Filmclub* seeks to fill this void, showing itself as a 'propitious place for this practice, disseminating cinematographic works that have no place in commercial exhibition network' (Butruce, 2003, p 123).

Aesthetic dimension involves a higher level of appreciation. Films are seen as an expressive work. Sensory stimulation and cognitive formulations provided by appreciation of movies produce meanings about human condition through artistic expression (Nunes et al., 2016). In capturing this dimension, film society movement seeks to form more sophisticated spectators, attentive to cultural and significant aspects of the seventh art.

When questionnaire asked to describe the factors that most attracted attention in the films, aesthetic element was quite recurrent. A student wrote the following:

Another aspect that I liked very much was **the way professors led us to perceive characteristics, similarities and aesthetic differences between the films**, making details that before I did not perceive were so clear, adding another tool for my cultural development and not only academic (Student 2).

Professors in fact had a concern in pointing out aesthetic differences. This element was always present during Seminar's project conception, so much that films were chosen very carefully. Although thematic and historical context between them are basically the same, although criticism has been equally complimentary, both films come from completely different schools of cinema.

Kamchatka is a film coming from the so-called the second Argentine *New Cinema*, whose main characteristics are absence of special or sound effects, seeking in simplicity, subtlety and creativity a sensitive look at social and political dilemmas. *Colonia*, on the other hand, is a typical Hollywood narrative, based on well-demarcated stories capable of entertaining the viewer intensely, with a wide use of special effects.

During discussions, students glimpsed these differences very well. An illustrative example is the following response: 'I greatly appreciated the choice of films and the contrast between the two caught my attention. *Kamchatka* relies on calm, familiar scenes of Argentine citizens and portrays what is to come, while *Colonia* reproduces struggle, fear, anxiety and a more 'visible' injustice'(Student 25).

In addition, forms also suggest an enchantment with the *discovery* of this dimension:

First of all I would like to thank you for this incredible initiative. Among factors that most excited me and which all my praise is concentrated are the simple fact of bringing me to my first Argentine cinema experience, in which I admit I didn't know deeply, **but after watching *Kamchatka* I will go deep into those kind of films** (Student 17).

These reports indicate that the Seminar fulfilled its role as an authentic film society activity. By offering an alternative cultural option, it contributes to a new generation of cinephilia, more demanding and sensitive to a truly appreciation of the seventh art.

3.2 Perception on transitional justice

Profile of those engaged in the Seminar is very favourable to enforce human rights. Although exactly half of the students (12) had never heard of transitional justice before, they all opposed dictatorships. 13 students (54.17%) *strongly disagree* of military regimes and 11 (45.83%) *disagree*. There was no *uncertain*, *agree* or *strongly agree* answers.

Even if public can be called *progressive* and therefore naturally inclined to advocate for transitional justice, film society still had a strong impact on the students' opinion. For 21 students (91.3%), watching movies and participating in discussions influenced their judgment of military regimes. In addition, 23 (95.83%) consider transitional justice an *extremely* or *very important* topic to be undertaken during IR undergraduate course.

Discursive answers found in forms suggest three significant aspects of film society in the perception on transitional justice. First is student's **immersion** on thematic and historical context of military regimes, as it shows the following answer:

What I most emphasize is clearness with both films **managed to transmit to the public harder aspects to be 'imagined'**, like methods of tortures used at that time, providing **a greater view of how things really happened**. A clearer connection with transitional justice became easier, since movies managed to convey the idea of historical moment lived not only in Argentina and Chile but in whole Latin America (Student 26).

Cinema has an unparalleled ability to attract and hold people's attention. Dialogues and images present in the scenes convey emotions and feelings more immediately apprehended by viewers. On the other side, no matter how much one may read and hear

about crimes against humanity perpetuated by dictatorial regimes, visual representation of violence elevates perception to another level. As a student pointed out, films convey ‘harder aspects to be ‘imagined’” (Student 26).

Immersion allows a second aspect, which is alterity. **Alterity** means putting yourself in *other’s* place, projecting yourself from another’s perspective. Almost all forms suggested this feeling, such as the following assertion well exemplifies: ‘(...) the fact both films provided a possibility of alterity in the context where movies were passing, we were able, with professors’ spur, to put ourselves in the place of protagonists, and this made us interpret and problematize much better the film’ (Student 18).

Trying to incorporate another’s point of view is a very significant exercise, because judgment becomes more sensitive to tolerance and dignity. As another student replied, film society ‘provided greater awareness, a notion about extension of military regimes in Latin America and **empathy for the persecuted**’ (Student 23). This *empathy* is the very exercise of alterity. Without it, understanding human rights’ meaning is seriously compromised.

Immersion and empathy generate a third and final aspect in perception on transitional justice: the prevalence of a **culture of redemption** over a culture of impunity. When one understands the gravity of crimes perpetuated by military regimes and puts oneself in the place of victims, first reaction of the students is to demand punishment of all those responsible and especially that memory do not be erased:

I understand that we must not forget atrocities committed in dictatorships, because remembering is important for awareness and for such barbarities do not happen again. Therefore, transitional justice plays an important role as mediator of past and present, **enabling torturers and all violators of human rights to be condemned and not go unpunished**. We cannot change the past but we can prevent past from changing future. I thank professors for this great initiative, in which I am very

proud to participate and I consider this tool as a great method to be followed (Student 3).

Of course it is imperative for an IR student a profound knowledge about how international courts operate and how to deal with treaties and legal disputes over the punishment of public officers who have committed crimes against humanity. However, human rights' debate transcends all those technical features. It seeks to understand social and cultural nature of human relationships involved. Precisely by promoting *immersion* and *alterity*, FURG's film society can be considered a very useful didactic tool.

3.3 Reading recommended bibliography

In the first meeting of film society, the project was presented and a specific bibliography was provided to support discussions. Students were advised to read all the material prior to next meetings, precisely so debates were enriched in terms of arguments and doubts.

Before first film session, results show there was not much effort in reading bibliography. 5 (22.73%) did not read *anything*, 3 (13.64%) *barely looked* at the material, 8 (36.36%) read *just a small amount*, 4 (18.18%) read *widely* and only 2 read *completely all the texts*. Eventual lack of reading by majority of those involved is minimally understood considering film society was not mandatory and the fact students were not familiar with this sort of activity.

However, as film society passed by, searching for texts grew considerable. 90.91% of students answered they felt encouraged to read recommended bibliography after attending their first film session. A statement is very illustrative in this respect:

I also felt from acquired knowledge in my first semester in college a difference **in my capacity to analyze facts and to identify studied theories** in discourses and behaviors of characters, both historical and fictitious (Student 10).

Film society reveals an advantage in teaching international relations. As the literature points out, movies serve as a kind of empirical case to be used to decipher abstract theories (Engert & Spencer, 2009). In this case, students feel more motivated and safe to face bibliography when engaging into film society and discovering they are able to understand content and actively follow discussions.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper evaluated film society as a didactic instrument of human rights education in an IR undergraduate course. As a result, starting from a case study at Federal University of Rio Grande, film society activity is seen as an efficient instrument to stimulate interest in human rights' studies. This conclusion can play an important role for IR education in Brazil, since the very career is conceived for elite of public and private sectors and based almost exclusively on commerce and negotiation.

On the other hand, using films in classroom in a truly relevant way demands an adequate methodology that contemplates premises of film society movement. Film exhibition should not be understood as mere entertainment, but instead as an educational experience. Planning should include a well-defined script, support bibliography, lectures, moments of discussion and collective reflection and also cannot forget aesthetic dimension of cinema through precise choice of works to be exhibited.

FURG's film society showed consistent positive results. In general terms, students were unanimous in emphasizing the importance of activity. Qualitative analysis of forms indicates film exhibition was able to capture student's attention, allowing immersion and the exercise of alterity, vital elements to a serious under-

standing of human rights importance. In addition, debates and discussions held after film sessions were a privileged space, both to consolidate knowledge and also to encourage reading recommended texts.

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