

## **Cultural and social interactions: cinema in focus**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents the results of a bibliographical research that had as corpus the films "Up to the limit of honor" (1997), "Race and redemption" (2019) and "The House of Spirits" (1993), an activity proposed in the discipline Cultural Representations: Literature and Cinema, of the master's degree in Sociocultural Practices and Social Development of the University of Cruz Alta – Unicruz. The purpose of this work was to discuss recurring themes in the contemporary society scenario, such as: machismo, social inclusion and prejudice, issues that are presented in the films analyzed.*

**Keywords:** cinema; gender; machismo; prejudice; social inclusion.

### **1. Initial notes**

When talking about cinema, first there is a need to highlight the fundamental role of the culture present in this process of unification that brings different layers of society together at different times. "Culture understands the processes that give meaning to our way of life. The theorists of cultural studies, particularly using semiotics, argue that language is the main mechanism by which culture produces and reproduces social meanings" (TURNER, 1997, p. 51).

The cinematographic language, articulating light, image, sound, space, scenery, costumes and a good script, works in the construction of these meanings that occupy space in the social imaginary. When speaking about the historical-social role of cinema, it can be said that films are unparalleled testimonies of everyday

life or the mentality of an era. The representation of films with different themes, whether historical and cultural, whether social, generally express the mentality of the director or producer. Some films, by the genre itself, are concerned with the reconstitution of the time, keeping the historical character in the scenery, in the objects, in the speeches and even in the posture of the actors.

In this article, there was no concern to elaborate a film review or an analysis of the interpretation of actors, seeking to establish a relationship between the reality created by the film contextualized with everyday reality. In this sense, this text seeks to discuss problems of current society, published in the films *Up to the limit of honor* (1997), under the direction of Ridley Scott; *Race and Redemption* (2019), directed by Robin Bissell, and *The House of Spirits* (1993), which had Bille August in the direction. These different films discussed here propose a debate in search of group relations, historical or political processes, the challenge is to draw positive or negative lessons from the films presented. As Silva et al (2020, p. 285) points out,

The films are books with moving images, colors and, mainly, sound, among other important elements, which have told fundamental stories for the understanding of the cultural diversity that has permeated human civilization since time immemorial. It can be said that this is one of the most popular arts, which affects people of all ages and all social classes.

Through cinematographic art, society has access to different artistic representations, of various styles and levels, whether popular, be erudite, since films often bring in their script part of a literary work, a dance, a special music, or even the exhibition of fine arts. Cinema recreates reality in an artistic way, reconstructs history or even proposes a new story. What is also observed is the influence that cinema exerts on people's perception, contributing to the way of seeing, recognizing and representing the world.

## **2. Methodological procedures**

This qualitative bibliographic research has as corpus the films *Up to the limit of honor* (1997), *Race and redemption* (2019) and *The house of spirits* (1982). This activity comes from the discipline Cultural Representations: Literature and Cinema of the Graduate Program in Sociocultural Practices and Social Development of the University of Cruz Alta – Unicruz. In terms of theoretical references, the research was based on authors such as: Turner (1997), Silva (2020), Monte (2013), Villard (2003), Lima (2018), Rosenstone (2010), Butler (2003), Lopes and Chehab (2015).

## **3. Results and discussions**

### *3.1 To the limit of honor: it has limit?*

The film *Up to the limit of honor* (1997) has as its plot the challenge of the insertion of women in the American Navy, through Lieutenant Jordan O'Neill, in an environment in which is present the machismo and distrust of the female ability to play the role. With this, the film shows the confrontation of prejudices and proposes to change behaviors. Through the political performance of Senator Lillian DeHaven, the U.S. Navy begins a process of incorporating women into its staff.

Directed by Ridley Scott, the action/drama film has in its cast: Demi Moore (Lieutenant Jordan O'Neill); Viggo Mortensen (Master Chief John James Urgayle); Jason Beghe (Royce); Anne Bancroft (Lillian DeHaven). Below, an illustrative photo of one of the scenes is presented.

Figure 1- Scenes from the movie *To the limit of honor*



[https://www.google.com/search?q=cenas+do+filme+at%C3%A9+o+limite+da+honra&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=mD6uvyGTHSACsM%252CMmpGcWZTikWZDM%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4kQsjQL6ta8YZKudWxHAm3h3pwFiOg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj37NHA7u\\_xAhXQrJUCHUZZDLAQ9QF6BAgqEAE#imgrc=mD6uvyGTHSACsM](https://www.google.com/search?q=cenas+do+filme+at%C3%A9+o+limite+da+honra&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=mD6uvyGTHSACsM%252CMmpGcWZTikWZDM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4kQsjQL6ta8YZKudWxHAm3h3pwFiOg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj37NHA7u_xAhXQrJUCHUZZDLAQ9QF6BAgqEAE#imgrc=mD6uvyGTHSACsM)

As we know, historically the spaces of the Army, Navy and Aeronautics have been occupied by men and, only in the twentieth century, women slowly began to enter this sphere, more specifically with the outbreak of World War II, regarding Brazil. On the other hand, "Gender differences in access to resources, power and authority affect the position of women in society" (MONTE, 2013, p. 70). In other words, what is certain is that men are in charge and, consequently, of power, and for women, in opposition, the space of submission. And that's what you see largely in the film in question.

Strength, virility associated with tradition and machismo are some of the issues that hindered the female entry into the environment of the Armed Forces, commanded by men. But over time this was changing, as Villard (2003, p. 29-30) points out.

An important battle in the war against pre-concept was won [...], with the entry of women into the Armed Forces. Many victories have been achieved since then; there remains, however, much to be achieved. Through a serious and competent work, the military area has shown to have the attributes necessary for the performance of certain activities in the barracks, increasingly narrowing the differences between the genders.

Returning to the film's plot, Senator Lillian DeHaven, played by actress Anne Bancroft, shows an alleged annoyance at the lack of respect and space for women in these military environments, and says she will only approve the candidacy of the future Minister of the Navy if he does anything to change that scenario. Against his will, he ends up yielding to the senator's request, but on one condition: a woman will be sent to do the most difficult military training, lasting three months. If she holds out to the end, women will have room in the Navy if she can't take it, that idea must be forgotten. The future minister only suggests this condition, because he believes that a woman, regardless of who he was, would not last a week in training.

In this context, Lieutenant Jordan O'Neill, played by actress Demi Moore, who, because of a political game of the senator, ends up being sent to a Military Training Center to make the most intense military special selection program, whose performance will decide the future of women in the Navy. O'Neill, excited that something so large and meaningful depends on her, enters her mission prepared for everything that awaits her.

As soon as she reaches the center, she begins to suffer the most diverse types of demotion and harassment and, instead of feeling inferior or afraid, she uses these abuses to fortify herself more and more. The more they harass her, the more she feels like being able! As the training goes on, she realizes that she is being treated differently by the officers, just because she is a woman, and she does not like it at all, not hiding her dissatisfaction. On the contrary, it makes it clear that it does not want special treatment because of their sex and wants to be treated like any man in this training is treated.

Regarding O'Neill's desire to be seen and treated equally, Lima's statement (2018, p. 3) is rescued: "Equality is the classic Western constitutional premise, a guarantee of human dignity that permeates as a commandment the isonomic treatment directed at all, and which presupposes the abolition of predilections, distinctions and discriminations. In fact, O'Neill just wanted to be accepted for his ability.

During the film, with all of O'Neill's speech and attitudes, the message she wants to send is very clear. A person's place, independent, whether it's a man or a woman, is where they want to be and not where society thinks they should be. Just as many men dream of serving their country, many women share that same dream, and it is not the large breasts and smaller muscles that make them unable or fragile to perform the same activities.

It is necessary to highlight that the female performance in originally male spaces required, on the part of the woman, a greater effort than that of the man himself: first to break with the stereotype, the prejudice rooted in the culture that women should occupy the space of the home, and man, the public space; according to proving that she is able to perform such a function for which she is often not desired. Like so,

[...] we cannot understand that the woman of sexist society was summing up to the stereotype of the "fragile sex". In many contexts, we see that women have had an important performance that goes directly against the representation of a macho society. Even assuming the validity of this model, several scholars nowadays claim that the woman has always had devices that show the exercise of a certain power and influence (Fonte Web).

Among the passages in the film that can be rescued for analysis purposes, we mention the discussion between O'Neill and his superior, who seeks to sabotage the training of the recruit, precisely because he believes that it is not up to a woman to go through such things, because he certainly sees her only as fragile sex.

One thing that bothers the viewer is the initial attitude of the other recruits with the arrival of O'Neill, filling her with the worst effrontery, just because they can't stand to see women occupying positions that they assumed only themselves could occupy. The fear of being demasculinized is so great, if a woman does something as well or better than them, which can lead to the question: Who are the fragile?

A black recruit was the only one to show support for the woman, as soon as she arrived at the training center, and this clearly shows that those who usually suffer prejudice, regardless of what it is, end up being

more empathetic to other people, because they know the horror of being discriminated against. Minorities know that they do not need to know a person's honor, for them to be worthy of respect or defense, because they, more than anyone else in a condition of privilege, know that no one is better than anyone else, and everyone should be treated fairly and humanely.

The film, highlighted by critics, for its quality, has, however, passages in which the characters are presented quickly, which sometimes motivates comments on the Internet about the issue. Clearly those who make these types of notes did not understand very well that the idea of the film is not to show the development of men in relation to the acceptance of women, in an environment that was considered masculine, but rather to show the insertion of women in these environments and how difficult it can be to deal with, but not impossible.

The special highlight goes to Demi Moore and Viggo Mortensen, who plays Commander John Urgayle. More than any other characters, they steal all the scenes with their incredible and successful performances. The scene in which O'Neill shaves his hair shows the character's commitment to taking on, more in a more real way, the role in the military corporation, seeking to get closer to his colleagues, equating to them. On the other hand, Master Chief treats O'Neill in the same rigorous way that he treats men, making her experience the same treatment that men military personnel receive, going through physical and mental torture, abuse of power, passing through a battery of exercises with a high degree of demands, to prove their ability to act in combat. Here, it is important to rescue "[...] the notion of gender [a] to be reformulated to encompass the power relations that produce the effect of a pre-discursive sex and thus conceal the very operation of discursive production" (Butler, 2003, p. 25-26).

As it is perceived, Demi Moore, through the role played, brings, in this film, a message of women's empowerment, which, in environments and situations in which machismo and prejudice preponderates, is capable of not only overcoming this vision, but demonstrating all the feminine strength and persistence.

### 3.2 Race and redemption: is it possible to union?

Figure 2 - Scene from the film *Race and Redemption*



[https://www.google.com/search?source=univ&tbm=isch&q=cenas+do+filme+ra%C3%A7a+e+reden%C3%A7%C3%A3o&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiD1f607\\_xAhWGGLkGHXu1Dz4Q4216BAgXEDI&biw=1366&bih=657#imgrc=8bxwsMwIgLNM1M](https://www.google.com/search?source=univ&tbm=isch&q=cenas+do+filme+ra%C3%A7a+e+reden%C3%A7%C3%A3o&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiD1f607_xAhWGGLkGHXu1Dz4Q4216BAgXEDI&biw=1366&bih=657#imgrc=8bxwsMwIgLNM1M)

Today, one of the most emblematic issues lies in the difficulty of ensuring balance in the political sphere. This supposed balance is apparently brought to the fore by the media, considering that different positions and social groups occupy the same spaces, sometimes in the same matter, allowing the look of both sides of the situation.

Thus, it offers the same space to racists and non-racists, doctors and charlatans, scientists and terraplants, democrats and autocrats. Conservative politicians believe that the school should teach both the evolution of species and creationism, while in Brazil, certain deputies demand that fake news be considered as legitimate as proven ones. As Rosenstone (2010, p. 17) points out:

Movies, miniseries, documentaries and historical documentary-dramas of great box office are increasingly important genres in our relationship with the past and for our understanding of history. Leaving them out of the equation when we think of the meaning of the past means condemning us to ignore the way a huge segment of the population came to understand the events and the people who make up history.

*Race and Redemption* (2019) is a film that brings in its theme the search for equivalences between white and black ethnicities, from the discussion of the school as a public space that can and should be attended by all, regardless of race and color.

Among the characters are Ann Atwater, played by actress Taraji P. Henson, black woman, poor and activist, and C.P. Ellis, played by actor Sam Rockwell, owner of a gas station and member of the Ku Klux Klan. Ann desires a life of respect, while C.P. Ellis wishes to exterminate her and others' lives by participating in armed attacks on black citizens.

The central conflict concerns the request of the black community, for their children to study at the same school as the white community, since the school had been burned down. In space-time terms, the film is set in North Carolina in the 1970s. It is verified the racist positioning of the local authorities, however, in the conduct of the issue, they can establish a mediation for the conflict, so that each party has an equivalent number of participants, in the meetings.

In one of these meetings, the black supremacist claims that he does not intend to see his student son next to black children. A black character then stands up to praise the honesty and sincerity of this speech.

Racism is stripped of its culture, its historical and socioeconomic specificity, to become a matter of "suffering": those who have suffered in life know what it means to be black.

For a timely time, it is noteworthy that "Racism is, therefore, a form of cruel prejudice that still affects a large portion of the world population" (PORFÍRIO, s.d., s.p.).

*Race and redemption* proposes dialogue and peace between whites and blacks, to make room for overcoming ideas as exclusionary as racism. With the symbolic handshake between the two ethnic groups, certainly the essence of racism is not eliminated, but the discussion is beyond the film, as an idea that needs to be reflected and advanced, so that communities can finally live-in peace.

In terms of production, the project transseems the team's care with the context in question. The low budget may not represent a large production, however Ellis recreates the 1970s with cars, houses and bearesive costumes, while demonstrating refinement when working with the well-lit space, on longer planes, inserting his characters into space and privileging silences.

Even so, the appearance of polished work is attenuated in front of scenes, in which the filmmaker demonstrates a heavier hand: the zooms on the face of the person who speaks against racism (and there are several encouraging speeches throughout the film), the approximations in an empty chair or a bell played inside the hospital, the sequence of vertigo after the sight of a KKK hood.

Regarding cinematographic lighting, Turner (1997, p. 60) points out that: "It can be said that there are two main objectives in cinematographic lighting: the first is expressive – establishing an emotional state, giving the film an 'appearance (such as ticianian coloring [...]), or contributing to details of the narrative, such as character and motivation".

In relation to the film, it is verified that, as well-intentioned as it may be, the discourse proves to be quite problematic in relation to the symmetry between racism and anti-racism. However, the film points out that it really believes that the conversation is the key to the resolution of all conflicts, including racism. In other words, the film reveals that it is possible to end racial prejudice, if there is a little goodwill on both sides.

### 3.3 *The House of Spirits: can one live in harmony?*

Figure 3- One of the covers of the film *The House of Spirits*



[https://www.google.com/search?q=cenas+do+filme+casa+dos+espiritos&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6Scm3iSVhb4OM%252CSZjxrWBIMz7qbM%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_kT3SPw5aiW83VBsJ0E57\\_Tl71EHqA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjf97v7\\_xAhWfDrkGHRj4BCQQ9QF6BAgBEAE#imgrc=6Scm3iSVhb4OM](https://www.google.com/search?q=cenas+do+filme+casa+dos+espiritos&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6Scm3iSVhb4OM%252CSZjxrWBIMz7qbM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_kT3SPw5aiW83VBsJ0E57_Tl71EHqA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjf97v7_xAhWfDrkGHRj4BCQQ9QF6BAgBEAE#imgrc=6Scm3iSVhb4OM)

The film is constituted in a narrative that creates and recreates the symbolic instances existing in the collective unconscious of each one, that is, the ability to interpret each symbolic figure depends on the experience, culture, critical consciousness, ideology of each spectator.

*The House of Spirits* (1993) is a film produced from the novel of the same name by Chilean writer Isabel Allende, released in 1982. The novel brings as a plot the story of three generations of women, whose setting is situated in the historical period of the political developments that occurred in Chile, in the 1920s until the military coup against President Salvador Allende, of whom Isabel was niece, by her father. Regarding this period, Lopes and Chehab (2015, s.p.) highlight that:

Military institutions in Chile have historically been characterized by institutional rigidity and segregation with civilian political issues. These factors, from 1920 onto the change of ideological character in Chilean society, led, among other movements, to the military coup of 1973 against then-President Salvador Allende, articulated by General Augusto Pinochet, who was installed in power for seventeen years.

The film rescues the childhood of the character Clara, who can keep in touch with spirits, including, as clairvoyant, is able to predict the death of her sister Rosa, even desire the death of her sister, which makes

her feel guilty, once the thought comes to fruition. In the face of what happened, he stops talking for a long time. The film focuses on the main characters of the novel until the arrival of Alba, Clara's granddaughter, played by actress Meryl Streep. The male pole of the film is centered on the figure of Esteban Trueba, played by Jeremy Irons, who takes a prominent position in the narrative.

Clara marries the fiancé of the deceased sister, returning to find joy in life, but keeping her side out of reality, wrapped in fantasy and contact with the spirit world. Thus, Clara's character lives in an imaginary universe, populated with infinite mystery, which can be approximated to the human unconscious itself, in general, in which desires, dreams and reality merge.

In this sense, "Unconscious desires tend to [sic] an achievement, restoring the signs related to the first experiences of satisfaction, through the primary process" (CORDEIRO, 2010, p. 4, Apud LAPLANCHE & PONTALIS, 2001). And that's exactly what happens to Clara.

Also, in this dimension is Férula, who always lived in the darkness, whether taking care of his mother or being submissive to Brother Esteban. The film shows the absence of colors in the life of Férula (played by actress Glenn Close) by the very black garment she always wore, as a way also to translate her unconscious and externalize her dissatisfaction with the life she led. Moreover, in relation to her, the film also brings the issues of human sexuality of a lonely woman, whose performance, as well as in literary work, merges consciously and unconsciously.

In terms of language, the film explores the very psychological configuration of the characters Clara, Esteban Trueba, Férula, Esteban's sister, and Alba: the first by clairvoyance; the second by machismo and arrogance; the third due to the affective dependence of sister-in-law Clara and the fourth character for political determination. Alongside the exploration of language, the film explores the incidence of the colors and gestures of the characters, contributing to the internal and external verisimilitude of the work.

Turner (1997, p. 51, Apud Barthes, 1973) points out that " '[...] the language' includes all those systems from which you can select and combine elements to communicate something." As Turner (1997, p. 51, Apud Barthes, 1973) emphasizes, "[...] clothing can be a language; by changing our way of dressing (choosing and matching clothes and thereby the meanings that culture attributes to them) we can change what our costumes 'say' about us and our place in culture."

In relation to Esteban Trueba, the film shows a man determined to build his heritage at any price, endowed with an aggressive character, an authoritarian temperament, which disconsiders the human side of the peasants who work for him, at The Farm Three Marys. As a sexist, he can rape a peasant woman, impregnating her and denying fatherhood to Esteban Garcia. Beside this inhuman setting, Esteban Trueba deeply loves his wife Clara.

The story grows. Blanca is considered "the first normal person in generations" in the Trueba family because she is not inclined to communicate with spirits. Since the family's first visit to Trés Marias, she has developed a strong bond with Pedro Terceira García Terceira Garcia, son of Pedro Segundo (Indian employee of Trueba). Esteban sincerely disapproves of this friendship, especially when Pedro Terceira begins to circulate revolutionary propaganda among peasants.

After his experimental chinchilla business fails, Jean Satigny falls in love with Blanca, who is not interested in him because she loves Pedro Terceira. Jean follows Blanca to the riverbank one night, where he witnesses her affair with Pedro Terceira. When he tells Esteban, the boss fingeers Blanca and hits Clara and she loses



several teeth. Mother and daughter leave Three Marys and return to "the big house on the corner". And Clara will never speak to him again. For several years, even living in the same house, they hardly ever see each other. They live with each other in a quiet way. Upon learning of the news involving his daughter with his employee, Esteban causes Blanca to leave the Três Marias farm and tries to kill Pedro Terceiro. Thus, it turns out that at another point in the film, Pedro becomes involved with Blanca, who, after attempts to remove both, by Trueba, results in Blanca's pregnancy. Alba is born and, only later, Pedro comes to know his daughter. Clara dies.

Esteban participates in the organization of the military coup that would take the military out of the barracks, but in power, the generals pursue to Blanca, and she is arrested, so that Peter will surrender. After the military coup, the Trueba family goes into decline, involving all its members, as well as the Chileans, in general.

In historical terms, to better understand what happened with the military coup and the transition period, leaving the dictatorship for a democratic era "[...] it is necessary to emphasize that, according to Norberto Bobbio (1986), the Political Regime is understood as 'the set of institutions that regulate the struggle for power and its exercise, as well as the practice of the values that animate such institutions' (DIETRICH, 2018, s.p. Apud BOBBIO, 1986, p. 1081). "In this sense, institutions constitute, on the one hand, the organic structure of political power and, on the other, are norms and procedures that make possible the regular and orderly development of the struggle for power." (DIETRICH, 2018, s.p. Apud BOBBIO, 1986). In the sequence, the film brings Trueba's inner struggle to decide whether to help Peter leave the country. For the sake of his daughter and granddaughter, Esteban helps Peter. Blanca is arrested, but her father manages to get her out of prison. As a kind of return to the past and therefore to the very meaning of their lives, Esteban Trueba, Blanca and his granddaughter Alba return to the farm Três Marias, exactly the scene that starts the film, showing that the film constituted a flashback.

#### **4. Final Notes**

In view of the discussions and problematizations generated by the films that were appreciated and analyzed, it was possible to verify how much interdisciplinary and essential issues to contemporaneity can be focused and discussed in the most diverse environments, not only educational, but in society. This is also one of the functions of cinematographic art: to narrate and share the complex human and sociocultural diversity.

The theme of the three films that constituted the corpus of this research, *Up to the limit of honor* (1997), *Race and redemption* (2019), and *The house of spirits* (1993), presents different social and cultural practices present, often in the society of different eras, also serving for the preservation of the memory that allowed the construction of the identity of different places, social agents and various issues.

To history cultural life through the films presented, specifically, is to glimpse around practices that pulse cultural life. Around these practices they gravitated dreamy brains, which dared to create and maintain cinemas. Around these practices hands searched for photos, newspapers, magazines and documents. The history of a people is also the reconstruction of its past, loaded with current affairs, which allows the understanding of its present.

Thus, the three films compose a mosaic of distinct stories, but which can intersect in the composition of different social and cultural practices of today, not always positive, but that serve for the viewer to reflect on such issues, since, through the artistic perspective, they constitute cultural expressions and as a form of interaction between the various characters that integrate the filmic narratives.

As it was perceived, the films bring in their narratives the practices of machismo and prejudice, such as *Up to the limit of honor* and *The house of spirits*. In *Race and redemption*, there is the presence of racism alongside the proposal to overcome this type of discrimination. On the other hand, up to the limit of honor there is also the presence of social inclusion, through the female performance of O'Neill in the American Armed Forces. With this, the objective of discussing recurring themes in the contemporary society scenario was achieved, based on the proposal of analysis of the listed films.

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