

* Film Review

Burn! - the use of a historical film in health education, Haiti, 2012

Stela Nazareth Meneghel

Medical health officer, MS and PhD in Medicine (UFRGS, 1989, 1996) with a post-doctorate in Social Psychology (UAB, 2006). Associate Professor of the course of Policy Analysis and Health Systems - Bachelor in Collective Health, PPG Health Collective and PPG Nursing / UFRGS. CNPq Productivity Fellow. Member of the Epidemiology Working Group / Brazil-Cuba-Haiti Tripartite Cooperation. stelameneghel@gmail.com.

Alcindo Antonio Ferla

Medical health officer; PhD in education and health (UFRGS). Adjunct Professor, School of Nursing, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul [Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul UFRGS]. Member of the Epidemiology Working Group / Brazil-Cuba-Haiti Tripartite Cooperation - alcindoferla@uol.com.br.

Joyce Mendes Shramm

Physician, Masters in Public Health and PhD in Public Health. Researcher at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation [Fundação Oswaldo Cruz]. Member of the Epidemiology Working Group / Brazil-Cuba-Haiti Tripartite Cooperation. joyce.mendes.andrade@gmail.com

Fabiano Barnart

Undergraduate in the Policy Analysis and Health Systems Course - Bachelor of Collective Health at UFRGS.

Mayna de Ávila

Nutritionist, Undergraduate in the Policy Analysis and Health Systems Course - Bachelor of Collective Health at UFRGS.

DOI: 10.3395/receis.v6i2.Sup1.623en



Director: Gillo Pontecorvo

Cast: Marlon Brando, Evaristo Márquez, Norman Hill, Renato Salvatori, Dana Ghia, Valeria Ferran Wanani, Giampiero Albertini, Carlo Palmucci, Thomas Lyons, Joseph P. Persaud.

Producer: Alberto Grimaldi

Writers: Gillo Pontecorvo, Franco Solinas, Giorgio Arlorio

Photography: Marcello Gatti, Giuseppe Ruzzolini

Soundtrack: Ennio Morricone

Run Time: 115 min.

Year: 1969

Country: Italy / France

Genre: Drama

This paper conducts a critical analysis of the film *Burn!*, which was used in epidemiology training for health care system workers in Haiti. The film is old but is relevant to a recent initiative that, in a way, brings it into the present. The story takes place on a fictional island called *Queimada* located in the Lesser Antilles. The name of the film is explained by the fact that the Portuguese burned the island to overcome the Indian resistance during the process of colonization, during which nearly all of the natives were killed. Thereafter, the Portuguese begin to traffic slaves from Africa to work in the cane fields. According to island legend, which is recounted early in the film, there is a white flat stone on the beach called the "White Cemetery of the Negros". The bodies of slaves who died during the voyage were placed there.

Although it contains a frank allusion to the history of Haiti, the film features characters who were not part of Caribbean history, such as the Portuguese, who did not have a colony in the Antilles; the Portuguese are also portrayed to be enemies of the English, although the Portuguese never actually severed relations with England. Although there are historical inaccuracies in the narrative of Pontecorvo, we understand that the film brings important contributions to the discussion of the historical reality of Haiti, which had the first successful slave revolution in the Americas.

The independence of Haiti, influenced by the French Revolution, is considered to be the only successful slave revolt since Classical Antiquity (MILANI, 2012). In 1791, on the island of Santo Domingo, the slave Toussaint L'Overture started a rebellion against the French ruling elite, which became a struggle for the emancipation of the colony and the abolition of slavery. The war continued for a period of ten years, during which time L'Overture was trapped by Napoleon Bonaparte's troops and taken to France. However, the slaves continued to resist, and in 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaimed the independence of the island, which was renamed Ayiti - the name given to the place by the first indigenous people, which means "land of mountains".

The island of Santo Domingo is also known as the Island of Haiti, Hispaniola or Espanola, which are names given to the island by the Europeans when they arrived there. The island belongs to the Antilles archipelago and, after Cuba, is the second largest island in the Caribbean. Located to the west of Puerto Rico and to the southeast of Cuba, the island of Santo Domingo is politically divided between two countries: the Dominican Republic on the east and Haiti to the west. It was on this island that Christopher Columbus established the first colony in America in 1493.

After Haiti attained independence from France, the countries that had maintained commercial ties with the island economically isolated Haiti, fearing that these acts of rebellion would expand to the American colonies. In addition to having to pay an exorbitant amount of indemnity to France, Haiti has suffered a severe economic crisis, especially after the death of Dessalines in 1806 (SILVA, 2012b).

The film was used as part of a continuing education program for workers in the Haitian health surveillance system, as proposed by the Working Group on Education, Information and Epidemiology (Grupo de Trabalho em Educação, Informação e Epidemiologia) conducted under the Brazil-Haiti-Cuba Tripartite Cooperation, which was initiated after an earthquake devastated part of the country in January 2010. The movie *Burn* was included in the first

module of the course as one of several pedagogical devices used to encourage the discussion of the history of diseases, epidemics and sanitary practices in Haiti.

One of the main objectives of the Haiti-Brazil-Cuba Tripartite Cooperation is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Public Health and Population of Haiti to conduct health surveillance. To achieve this goal, we designed an intervention project, providing for the establishment of rooms for the ongoing analysis of epidemiological data. These rooms have been named the Spaces for Education and Health Information. The proposal was developed by a team composed of representatives from Brazilian institutions, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) and Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) as well as panelists from the Ministry of Health and Population of Haiti and the Cuban Brigades.

An educational project (PROJETO, 2012) was prepared to train the Haitian health care professionals who will operate the Spaces for Education and Health Information (Espaços de Educação e Informação em Saúde - EEIS). These spaces will operate at a departmental level, and their objectives are to enhance the analysis of epidemiological data produced in the 10 Haitian health departments or regions and to integrate the surveillance activities with health education. The training seeks to strengthen the epidemiological surveillance system (ES) and to help improve the information systems, health surveillance activities and management of the health care system in Haiti.

The pedagogical approaches that guide this process include continuing education, education guided by everyday work practices and critical and problem-solving character education (BRAZIL, 2007). This perspective cuts across the training process and is present throughout the entire course. The project will be developed in a theoretical and practical manner, maintaining the intercommunication between education and work such that learning is ethically and operationally integrated with the qualifications of the health services.

The content of the modules was selected by consensus by the Brazil-Cuba-Haiti work groups, and the theoretical material is being adapted from Brazilian and international references. The modules are focused on the sanitary conditions in Haiti and the epidemiological and demographic data of the country. The modules will be developed based on the experience accumulated by the three cooperating countries with proposals for universal health care, participatory methodologies and the assumptions of primary health care.

In this process, epidemiology is treated as a critical and social character tool that is grounded in the reality of the country and focused on describing, analyzing and resolving the most prevalent health problems in the population (BREILH, 2006).

The thematic modules refer to the major themes of epidemiology but were developed in conjunction with the public health proposals. The first module examines the concepts of health / disease, sanitation practices and health care systems. A second set of issues or themes involves describing and measuring disease frequency in the population, developing demographic, health, disease and death indicators and emphasizing the inequalities produced by gender and social class. One final module addresses the surveillance of the health care field (i.e., epidemiological, sanitary and environmental fields, including disaster and public health laboratory support) and the analysis of the health situation. The latter analysis considers not only quantitative aspects but also a qualitative assessment of the culture, social organization, artistic production and resistance movements initiated by the population.

Each module consists of a set of classroom activities that are guided by a theoretical and practical text, exercises, texts, the use of a virtual community, distance studies, additional readings, films and other materials. Cinematic references are heavily used throughout the course because film can be used as a medium for critical reflection on the problems of society, including the major themes of collective health.

For the purpose of using films in the classroom, we assert that images are increasingly endowed with feeling and are excellent triggers for academic discussions and learning. Carl Plantinga (1997) stated, "*Films and videos hold much power in Western culture. They play a bardic role. They negotiate cultural values and meanings, disseminate information (and misinformation), provoke social change and generate fundamental cultural debates*".

For the first course meeting, in which we discussed health as a historical, political and social event, we selected the Italian movie called *Burn!* (PONTECORVO, 1969). Pontecorvo, an Italian director in the 1960s who also directed the classic "The Battle of Algiers", creates a social and denunciative cinema. In *Burn!*, he depicts the over-exploitation of slaves on sugar plantations in the Caribbean during the 18th century.

This film was chosen for a training course for the personnel operating the Spaces for Education and Health Information for several reasons. One reason is the difficulty in obtaining the film, which was banned in Brazil during the military dictatorship. Another factor is that this film is generally unknown in Haiti. Moreover, there was the desire to show the group of Haitian professionals the issues related to researching and studying the social, political and health/sanitary history of the country and not simply provide a complete package of epidemiological and statistical tools and techniques.

The commitment of the team working to establish bonds and a respectful relationship with health workers in Haiti was implicit. Moreover, we wanted to reaffirm our desire to know the Haitian people, their culture and the revolutionary saga that was inscribed in the imaginary and day-to-day life of the people, which is present in the references imprinted into the urban fabric. It is here, at each step, that we find the names of Toussaint, Dessalines, Petion, Henri-Cristophe, Ti Noel and Macandal. The legendary figure of Macandal is that of a slave who led one of the first uprisings in Haiti. Having a deep understanding of herbs and plants, he organized a series of actions in the revolt that poisoned the white population. Macandal was killed in the fire but remains alive as a popular folk hero and is sung about in folklore and voodoo rituals.

Macandal, who could transform into a hoofed animal, bird, fish or insect. From metamorphosis to metamorphosis, the maimed were everywhere, having recovered his personal integrity under the garb of animals. Everyone knew that the green lizard, the night moth, the unknown dog and the incredible pelican were but simple disguises. With wings one day, gills on the other, creeping or galloping, he owned the underground rivers, caves of the coast, the treetops and now reigned throughout the island (CARPENTIER, 1997 p. 22).

In telling the story of the mythical black rebellion through the movie *Burn!*, we wanted, in a certain way, to speak of the extraordinary events that occurred on the island of Santo Domingo during the war of independence, which were metaphorically described in the images of the film. In short, we wanted to touch upon the extraordinary events and render a chorus to

Carpentier (1985), when he asks *"After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous reality?"*

In the film, Marlon Brando plays the British agent Walker, who was sent from England to provoke a revolution by offering the slaves the financial support of the British, who wanted to seize control of the colony and take possession of the immense wealth produced by the sugar industry. Walker's goal is to contact the insurgent leader; but when he arrives on the island, the black leader has already been arrested and executed. At that time he meets the slave José Dolores, one of the few blacks on the island who speaks English. José Dolores then offers to carry his bags. Convinced that this man can replace the lost leader, he approaches him. Walker involves José Dolores in a demagogic trap and hides the colonialist interests of the British, making the slave believe that he defends the liberty of the black population.

In cinematic allusions to the slave revolts that occurred in the Antilles, there is at times explicit mention of the revolution in Haiti and the libertarian figure of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the skillful strategist who said: " C'est chez nous que règne le véritable droit de l'homme" [It is in us that reign true human rights]" (1979).

Some critics consider Pontecorvo's film to be anachronistic, claiming that he holds up a Manichean dichotomy between the colonizer/colonized, victims/perpetrators and masters/slaves. However, this so-called Manichaeism, in our view, does not seem far from the dialectic of master and slave in times of neoliberalism. We return to the Hegelian idea of the text in the sense that in the relationship between two men, in the context of servitude, there is only the possibility of freedom for the slave, through consciousness and revolution, whereas for the master there is no escape, and he remains imprisoned in the snare of power (SILVA, 2012a).

Another restriction regarding the film would be the idea of rising awareness, originating from the revolutionary ideologies of the 1960s. The film portrays the political thinking of the time, when the choices of the guerrillas and the Cuban revolution were very real.

The dialogue between the imprisoned Dolores and the soldier who accompanies him is exemplary: "It may be that they release him, General," said the soldier. "If they want to release me, I'd rather die. We do not win freedom, we conquer it, understand?". "No", replied the soldier. "One day you'll understand, because you have already started thinking," dialectically concludes General Dolores. Pontecorvo presents the passage of the naive consciousness of the revolutionary Dolores, which will gradually uncover the mechanism of the oppression/submission of the slave society until it reaches a critical awareness. In this sense, the film is true to Marxist assumptions, in which it "is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."

We can draw an analogy between the process of transitioning from a naive consciousness towards a critical consciousness, which was suffered by the revolutionary Dolores during the movie, and the process reported by Freire (1996) from his political-pedagogical experience with peasants. We can also draw an analogy with the curiosity these peasants faced toward the violence of the injustices suffered in their daily lives because they share the same curiosity, which is in contrast with the engagement in the otherness of the other, the "non-

self", with which scientists and academic philosophers contemplate the world. Overcoming the naiveté of the peasants occurs in the process of becoming epistemologically curious.

The pedagogical device proposed in the educational course aims, through the problematization of resources such as film, to act as a catalyst in this ongoing process of transforming naive curiosity into critical learning and problematizing or epistemological curiosity.

Obviously, we are not imposing upon a plundered and suffering people that they rebel, mobilize, organize to defend themselves to change the world. The objective of this effort is, in reality (i.e., it does not matter whether we work with literacy, health, evangelism or all of these areas), in conjunction with specific work in each of these areas, to challenge the popular groups to perceive, in critical terms, the violence and profound injustice that characterize their actual situation. Further, we challenge the groups to perceive that their particular situation is not a certain destiny or will of God, but rather a situation that can be changed (FREIRE, 1996).

Another highlight of the movie lies in the realism of the outdoor scenes, the depiction of the life of a slave population, the precarious wattle-and-daub homes, the lack of water, the unsanitary conditions in the villages, the poor diet and the exhausting work on the plantation and in sugar mills. The maintenance of slavery by plantation owners relied on brutal punishment and involved a level of relentless persecution. Punishments using whips were common as was the mutilation of the slaves' limbs, ears and genitals. The slaves were tied with chains to wooden blocks and bound to poles driven into the ground (MILANI, 2012). The realism of the scenes is contrasted with the *glamor* of certain historical reenactments in which the slave population appears well dressed and well fed and has friendly relationships with the colonizers.

Victorious rebellion, proclaimed independence, José Dolores leaves the mountains and heads to the coast accompanied by thousands of blacks who have followed him in one of the most beautiful scenes in the film. His army marches to the sound of the spectacular soundtrack of Ennio Morricone, a kind of rock opera that recalls the movie Hair, where the voices insistently repeat the word 'abolition'. A kind of song, a hymn to liberty, to victory over all oppressions, one of the most generous utopias of the 1960s expressed by Potencorvo's movie (ALBUQUERQUE JUNIOR, 2012).

In conclusion, watching this movie in the context of an epidemiology course encourages the group to think of health, disease, and health care without neglecting historical reflection and social criticism.

References

ALBUQUERQUE JÚNIOR, D. M. Utopias queimadas. Available at: <http://www.cchla.ufrn.br/ppgh/docentes/durval/artigos/utopias_queimadas.pdf>. Accessed on: 24 jul. 2012.

BRAZIL. Ministério da Saúde. Secretaria de Gestão Estratégica e Participativa. Departamento de Apoio à Gestão Participativa. **Caderno de Educação Popular**. Brasília, DF, 2007. Available at: <http://portal.saude.gov.br/portal/arquivos/pdf/caderno_de_educacao_popular_e_saude.pdf>. Accessed on: 24 jul. 2012.

BREILH, J. **Epidemiologia crítica**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz; 2006.

CARPENTIER, A. **O reino deste mundo**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1985.

LOUVERTURE, T. **De l'esclavage au pouvoir**. Port-au-Prince : Edition de l'École, 1979.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogia da Autonomia**. São Paulo: Terra e Paz, 1996.

MILANI, A. A revolução negra. Available at: <http://www2.uol.com.br/historiaviva/reportagens/revolucao_negra_7.html>. Accessed on: 24 jul. 2012.

PLANTINGA, C. R. **Rethoric and Representatiton in Nonfiction film**. Cambridge, U.K.; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

PROJETO de Cooperação Internacional Tripartite Brasil, Haiti e Cuba. Available at: <<http://cooperacaotripartitehaiti.tumblr.com/>>. Accessed on: 24 jul. 2012.

SILVA, R. G. A. A dialética do senhor e do escravo no contexto da consciência de si e do mundo do trabalho. Available at: <<http://www.slideshare.net/ricardogeo11/a-dialtica-do-senhor-e-do-escravo-no-contexto-da-conscincia-de-si-e-o-mundo-do-trabalho-anlise-da-alienao>>. Accessed on: jul. 2012a.

SILVA, T. F. Independência do Haiti. Available at: <<http://www.infoescola.com/historia/independencia-do-haiti/>> acesso >. Accessed on: 24 jul. 2012b.