

Historical Memory and Social Representation of Violence in Latin American Cinema: A Cultural Criminology Approach

Authors : Maylen Villamanan Alba

Abstract : Latin America is marked by its history: conquest, colonialism, and slavery left deep footprints in most Latin American countries. Also, the past century has been affected by wars, military dictatorships, and political violence, which profoundly influenced Latin American popular culture. Consequently, reminiscences of historical crimes are frequently present in daily life, media, public opinion, and arts. This legacy is remembered in novels, paintings, songs, and films. In fact, Latin American cinema has a trend which refers to the verisimilitude with reality in fiction films. These films about historical violence are narrated as fictional characters, but their stories are based on real historical contexts. Therefore, cultural criminology has considered films as a significant field to understand social representations of violence related to historical crimes. The aim of the present contribution is to analyze the legacy of past and historical memory in social representations of violence in Latin American cinema as a critical approach to historical crimes. This qualitative research is based on content analysis. The sample is seven multi-award winning films of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema of Havana. The films selected are Kamchatka, Argentina (2002); Carandiru, Brazil (2003); Enlightened by fire, Argentina (2005); Post-mortem, Chile (2010); No, Chile (2012) Wakolda; Argentina (2013) and The Clan, Argentina (2015). Cultural criminology highlights that cinema shapes meanings of social practices such as historical crimes. Critical criminology offers a critical theory framework to interpret Latin American cinema. This analysis reveals historical conditions deeply associated with power relationships, policy, and inequality issues. As indicated by this theory, violence is characterized as a structural process based on social asymmetries. These social asymmetries are crossed by social scopes, including institutional and personal dimensions. Thus, institutions of the states are depicted through personal stories of characters involved with human conflicts. Intimacy and social background are linked in the personages who simultaneously perform roles such as soldiers, policemen, professionals or inmates and they are at the same time depict as human beings with family, gender, racial, ideological or generational issues. Social representations of violence related to past legacy are a portrait of historical crimes perpetrated against Latin American citizens. Thereby, they have contributed to political positions, social behaviors, and public opinion. The legacy of these historical crimes suggests a path that should never be taken again. It means past legacy is a reminder, a warning, and a historic lesson for Latin American people. Social representations of violence are permeated by historical memory as denunciation under a critical approach.

Keywords : Latin American cinema, historical memory, social representation, violence

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