



HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Select case studies of the social and political impact of recent HRWIFF entries

2005 FESTIVAL

STATE OF FEAR

http://hrw.org/iff/2006/london/films.html#state_of_fear

"State of Fear," Pamela Yates, Paco de Onis and Peter Kinoy's examination of Peru's brutal "war on terror," opened the 2005 edition of the festival and most recently was awarded the prestigious Overseas Press Club of America award for best reporting in any medium about Latin America (2007). The film has been translated into 48 languages and was broadcast in 157 countries by National Geographic Channels International.

At screenings in Peru, citizens spontaneously stood up one by one and started to tell wrenching stories of their personal experiences during Peru's period of civil strife, remembers de Onis. "The audience wasn't interested in asking us filmmakers any questions," he says. "They made the film their own, and the sorrow and anger of their stories eventually gave way to a discussion among the audience on how to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening to their country again."

Shortly after the arrest of President Alberto Fujimori in Chile on November 7th, 2005, "State of Fear" was broadcast on Peruvian TV in advance of elections to remind the public of the findings of the Peruvian Truth Commission and the corruption of the Fujimori regime. Peruvian human rights activists have also screened the film in Chile in order to inform the public about Fujimori's past.

Because the overwhelming majority of victims in the war were Quechua-speaking Indians, a Quechua version of "State of Fear" – the first film ever to be dubbed in the indigenous language -- will be launched August 2007 in Peru during the 4th anniversary of the Peruvian Truth & Reconciliation Commission. There is a planned outreach campaign, with free copies to be distributed to human rights organizations throughout Peru.

In Nepal, pro-democracy advocates have also embraced the film, despite the fact that a screening was shutdown by government forces. They have distributed 50 copies of "State of Fear," and a Nepali version of the film was produced in October 2005 and is being used as an organizing and educational tool in the struggle to regain democracy in Nepal.

In Northern Ireland and Columbia, the film is also being used as an educational tool in ongoing efforts to explore conflict resolution methods. And in Russia, the film screened at the Stalker Human Rights Festival and has also been used by NGOs to attack President Vladimir Putin.

In fall 2007, there will finally be a U.S. broadcast on the Sundance Channel.

LA SIERRA

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#la_sierra

Directed by Scott Dalton and Margarita Martinez Escallon, "La Sierra" follows three young people struggling to survive amidst Colombia's brutal illegal paramilitary war. Since the film was shown at the festival, "La Sierra" aired locally in Colombia on Caracol TV, with a record nine million viewers, according to Escallon. There were news articles on issues of teenage pregnancy and paramilitaries in the most important magazines and newspapers, from caricatures to editorials and columns.

"It changed the lives of the people who participated in the documentary and the neighborhood," says Escallon. The Catholic Church, which is the only institution with a permanent presence for those shown in the film, has received considerable help from private individuals and foundations to supply funding for education programs

as well as a program called "Buen Comienzo" ("Good Start"), which supplies milk and bread for all children up until two-years-old.

Don Jairo, the father of the main character who was killed, received help from a private individual, and one of his daughters is going to college because another private individual is paying her tuition.

Because of the attention that the neighborhood received from the film, the local government of Medellin also started a program for the victims of the war, focusing on psychological help and workshops for the kids, according to Escallon. They also worked to get more kids in the public schools; 280 children who were not in school are now attending. They also helped publish a book with the stories of the family members' victims of the war called "Jamás olvidare tu nombre" ("I will never forget your name.")

THE BOYS OF BARAKA

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#the_boys_of_baraka

Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's "The Boys of Baraka" – about an experimental boarding school in Kenya for "at risk" American boys -- went on to garner a nomination for best documentary from the International Documentary Association, but more importantly, it also served as a catalyst for new dialogues on urban education and directly impacted the lives of the young men from Baltimore that appeared in the film.

"Being in the movie effected all the kids enormously," says Grady. "The attention, conversation and general life experiences associated with sharing the film with the world has taken the kids all over the country and exposed them to people they would never have met. At this point they all want to be Hollywood movie stars," she adds. "But much more importantly I feel they have an added personal responsibility to stay on a positive path because they feel the world is watching and actually cares how it turns out for them."

Unfortunately, the Baraka boarding school depicted in the film never reopened, but a non-profit group set up a college scholarship fund for the boys that weren't able to attend their second year at Baraka. In addition, funding for a residential boarding school was approved to service 400 at-risk kids in Baltimore called the SEED school, based on the effect the film had on Baltimore administration, according to Grady. For more information on the Associated Black Charities' Baraka Youth Empowerment Fund, go to: <<<http://www.abc-md.org/baraka.htm>>>

NO MORE TEARS SISTER: ANATOMY OF HOPE AND BETRAYAL

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#no_more_tears_sister

Helene Klodawsky's portrait of assassinated Sri Lankan activist Dr. Rajani Thiranagama helped re-ignite her message of peace and justice 15 years after her death. Winner of the Spirit of Freedom Award at the Jerusalem International Film Festival and broadcast on PBS last summer (2006), the film has "kick-started debate on human rights in Sri Lanka in a new and significant way," says director Helene Klodawsky.

Since "coming out" in the documentary, Rajani's family has decided to make its ever-present activism more open and vocal. "In speaking so openly in the film — even at great risk to themselves — Rajani's family could not help but move others to do the same," says the filmmaker.

"Human rights advocates around the world have seen the film and endorsed Rajani's message," adds Klodawsky, "from South Africa to Asia, Australia, North America and Europe. As evidenced by vigorous Internet exchanges, it has been seen and talked about throughout the Sri Lankan diaspora by people from all walks of life."

"At one screening in Alberta, a Sri Lankan announced the film was worth more than all the aid Canada sends to his country," remembers Klodawsky. "And of course introducing family members to applauding crowds in Toronto, New York and London has been electrifying."

While Klodawsky looks forward to the day when "No More Tears Sister" will be televised nationally in Sri Lanka, in both Tamil and Sinhalese, she acknowledges, "this remains a contentious decision."

SEOUL TRAIN

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#seoul_train

Directors Jim Butterworth, Aaron Lubarsky, and Lisa Sleeth first learned in 2003 about the plight of North Korean refugees trying to escape their country and seek refuge in an unwelcoming China. Just two years later, the searing documentary "Seoul Train" was shown to the International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees' Human Rights (IPCNKR), whose attendees included U.S. Congressman Dennis Hastert, as well as the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo. Before the screening, a journalist leaned over to director Butterworth, he remembers, and said, "You know, your film has really dealt a body blow to the crisis."

One concrete example, according to Butterworth, is that the film has helped put pressure on the U.S. government to follow through on its implementation of the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004, which continues to lag behind its mission to help fund NGOs working with refugees.

Butterworth explains that activists have also used the film to gather support for their efforts. Countless people and policymakers worldwide have volunteered their time as a result of having seen the film, he says. "Last November, the European Union sponsored the first-ever UN General Assembly resolution condemning North Korea and China over their treatment of refugees."

The film has screened three times on Capitol Hill, to the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations twice, as well as the EU Parliament, and Hong Kong, where a number of NGOs have run with it. Butterworth believes underground groups in China have also shown the film (it's been translated in Mandarin, and 19 other languages.) The Vice Foreign Minister of China has a copy, as does Kim Jong-il ("as does Bush, for that matter — Han-mi gave him a copy in April when they met," says

Butterworth). "While it's tough to measure direct cause and effect," he says, "I do know that 'Seoul Train' has kept the crisis on the front burner."

Unfortunately, two of the three refugee groups shown in the film were sent back to North Korea to an unknown fate, "though many, if not most, have likely since died," Butterworth admits. The surviving group live well in South Korea, and the film has made them something of celebrities, according to Butterworth.

"The most poignant moments came, however, when any of the literally hundreds of college-aged Korean-Americans have come up to me," says Butterworth, "and said, 'I'm involved with helping North Koreans because of 'Seoul Train.'"

MARDI GRAS: MADE IN CHINA

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#mardi_gras

David Redmon's exposé on the manufacturing of Mardi Gras beads in China has had its most profound impact in New Orleans. After seeing the film, there are Mardi Gras groups and krewes who have refused to order plastic beads from China, or anywhere else, according to the director. At last year's Mardi Gras, Redmon partied with a krewe that made their own beads. Other New Orleans organizers are looking into fair-trade and "green beads," says Redmon. "There have been repeated screenings of the film in New Orleans and the word is spreading."

In China, however, where Redmon videotaped the brutal working conditions of female laborers at a bead factory, the impact of the film is harder to gauge. While Redmon says several groups in China – mostly in Hong Kong – have shown the film to other organizations and workers, Redmon was kicked out of China, is forbidden from returning and the owner of the Tai Kuen Bead Factory no longer returns his emails or phone calls. Apparently he "got in trouble" by government officials for agreeing to be in the film, says Redmon. "Can you believe that? No trouble for the working conditions, but in trouble for becoming visible."

"If the factory was in the US, then it'd be easier," says Redmon, of making a difference. "Globalization decreases accountability and increases invisibility."

LIVING RIGHTS

http://www.hrw.org/iff/2005/ny/films.html#living_rights

Filmmaker Duco Tellegen ("Behind Closed Eyes," 2002 HRWIFF) focuses on the troubles facing three young people on three different continents: Yoshi, a sixteen-year-old Japanese boy with Asperger's Syndrome; Toti, a Maasai runaway of fourteen; and Lena, a eleven-year-old girl beset by illness who lives near Chernobyl. While Tellegen says the social impact of the film is difficult to measure, the making of the film and its public screenings have generally spurred discussions around the issues of children's rights. The filmmaker feels there is more of a chance to have an influence in school screenings, he says, "Maybe its more likely to influence and educate (young) people about their and others' situations."

As for directly affecting the lives of the three kids, Tellegen admits that he always supports the main characters of his films financially: "mostly try to find something sustainable," he says. But in another way, the film has also helped the kids survive. With Lena, he helped pressure the government to allow an adoption that would better attend to her healthcare needs. In Yoshi's case, they helped change his educational program. And Toti, adds Tellegen, "only dared to go back to her parents if we would accompany her."

"The whole concept of the film and its impact only starts to work now," he says, through lectures, festivals and educational programs.

2006 FESTIVAL

THE REFUGEE ALL STARS

<http://hrw.org/iff/2006/ny/films.html#1>

The opening night gala selection of the 2006 Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, Zach Niles and Banker White's "The Refugee All Stars" has helped raise the profile of the six Sierra Leonean refugee musicians depicted in the film, and even contributed to their international stardom. "The thing that we did that we're not supposed to do as documentary filmmakers is that we became friends with our

subjects and we became invested in helping them as friends," says Niles. "The band wouldn't have ever made an album if it weren't for us."

To promote the film, the filmmakers brought the musicians to the U.S. and helped cultivate a publishing deal with Warner Chappell Music and a record deal with ANTI Records (home to such luminaries as Tom Waits and Nick Cave). The band has since toured North America, brought out 8,000 people to Central Park, played music festivals in Japan and Montreal, while the film scored endorsements from the likes of Ice Cube, Paul McCartney and Angelina Jolie, and landed a PBS broadcast, scheduled for this year (2007).

"What I think is great about the Human Rights Watch Film Festival is they really appeal to a wide audience and they pick films that can be popular, as well," adds Niles. "I think that the festival generated more press than any other festival, because they give equal attention to all of their films."

The filmmakers have also aligned themselves with International Rescue Committee, which screened the film, and Survivors of Torture International, which used the film as one of their fundraisers. Additionally, the UNHRC and FilmAid International sponsored international screenings.

"For me, our favorite and biggest complement is when people say, 'I want to know more about the background, what happened in Sierra Leone?'" says Niles. "If we can get five people to learn about what happened in Sierra Leone, I think it's a really positive thing."

DIAS DE SANTIAGO

<http://hrw.org/iff/2006/ny/films.html#5>

Peruvian director Josue Mendez' 2004 feature debut "Dias de Santiago" is a blistering study of a twitchy young war veteran, as he tries to re-integrate into society. While the narrative drama has played at film festivals around the world and is available in the U.S. on DVD, its social impact is hard to gauge, according to the director. "It is shown by scholars in colleges and also in seminars of human rights,

focusing on sociological and psychological topics," says Mendez. "But here in Peru everyday events are so scandalous that what 'Dias de Santiago' narrates really is diminished by actual situations."

ROSITA

<http://hrw.org/iff/2006/ny/films.html#16>

Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater's insightful look at the rape of Rosita, a nine-year-old Nicaraguan girl in Costa Rica and the resulting political fallout that ensued after her parents sought out an abortion, was broadcast all over Latin America repeatedly during the summer of 2006 by HBO Latin America. "We know this caused controversy and dialogue," says Goldwater. "We saw some articles and noted that the Catholic Church had a website to try to boycott HBO as a result."

"Sadly, in fall 2006, the Sandanistas in Nicaragua made a political deal to criminalize abortion in exchange for the support of the church in the fall election," continues Goldwater. "So Nicaragua has gone backwards."

But human rights groups and educational organizations continue to use the film and keep up the fight for women's rights. Recently, the filmmakers were excited to learn that the Chilean women's health organization EPES (Educación Popular En Salud) received a grant from the Ford Foundation with the ultimate goal of decriminalizing abortion in Chile. By incorporating screenings of "Rosita" at focus groups, EPES hopes to de-politicize the issue and to ground the discussion in a real life story. All participants in the focus groups will receive a copy of "Rosita" to share with colleagues, friends and family, according to Goldwater.

RAIN IN A DRY LAND

<http://hrw.org/iff/2006/ny/films.html#14>

Anne Makepeace's latest documentary chronicles two years in the lives of Somali Bantu refugee families recently placed in Springfield, Massachusetts and Atlanta, Georgia. Airing on PBS in June, 2007 right before World Refugee Day, the film has been used to help raise awareness in the U.S. for the plight of refugees and screened

in refugee camps in Kenya as an educational tool via FilmAid International. The International Organization for Migration is also using the film to help prepare refugees coming to America.

Active Voice's Shaady Salehi says the film has been used by a range of other organizations, including resettlement agencies, immigrant rights advocates, and even a youth hostel. "Many events were targeted to general audiences, but we've also had instances when the film has been used specifically to train those who work directly with refugees, and also to specifically engage Somali Bantu communities and encourage them to share their own stories," she says, citing specific screenings in both Atlanta and Springfield, but also Buffalo, New York, Tucson, Arizona and Omaha, Nebraska.

SOURCE

<http://hrw.org/iff/2006/ny/films.html#22>

Czech filmmakers Martin Mareček and Martin Skalský shot their penetrating and wry documentary about Azerbaijan's corrupt oil industry -- and British Petroleum's complicity in the impoverishment and pollution of local citizens -- in 2004. While the directors can't take sole credit for resistance against the system, Skalský says there have been numerous positive developments. After "Source" was released, one NGO from Azerbaijan embarked on several successful court cases against illegal land expropriation, according to Skalský, while certain additional financial compensations were paid to affected landowners. "We suppose that extensive showing of our documentary, together with international NGO campaigns, helped in some particular cases of human rights violations," he says.

The filmmakers also tried to impact international banks (EBRD, World Bank) by sending them copies of the film and "asking them for a response." None came. Still, "Source" has screened all over the world, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Brazil, Germany, the Ukraine, the U.S. and the UK, but not yet in Azerbaijan. While the film may not have created any significant pressure on the Azeri government, oil companies -- through Western public opinion -- could have a more profound impact. As Skalský says, the film "works, of course, as a good tool for public awareness."