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## **“International Relations through the Arts (How to Learn International Relations through Films, Songs, Cartoons)”**

*MIREES Open lecture*

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On 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, professor Itir Toksöz, who is currently teaching at the Department of International Relations at Dogus University (İstanbul), lectured the MIREES' students on the key role of art, when studying international relations. Professor Toksöz divided the lesson in three parts: in the first section, she analyzed international relations through movies and visual art, then, she considered the use of songs, video clips and lyrics and, lastly, she addressed the topic of the connections between international relation and science fiction.

Concerning the link between international relations and films, professor Toksöz focused on the emotional effect that movies can have on the spectator; in fact, she said, films are a powerful tool, because they engage the audience in a multilevel experience. Furthermore, to the contrary of what we can normally find in a textbook, movies don't focus only on the decision makers, on the heroes and on the famous historical characters, but also represent simple and average people; as a consequence, the spectator can feel empathy and can self-identify more easily. However, there are disadvantages in studying international relations through films; as the first point, movies are fictional and personal interpretation of events. Furthermore, they can be one-sided, or biased. Secondly, films can create stereotypes. In fact, if people of a certain country are shown always in a certain way, through repetition, this image will be internalized by the audience. The example reported by Toksöz was an essay, written by Jack Shaheen, entitled “Reel Bad Arabs”. This work has demonstrated that, since the 1890s, in Hollywood films, Arabs are always portrayed as violent, uncivilized, religious fundamentalist and are often associated with kidnapping and raping girls; this created a negative imagine of “the Arabs” in the American audience. Lastly, film industries are in the hand of a limited number of countries, so the events shown in the movies will be culturally biased and selected on the base of the interests of those particular nations.

Considering the theme of music, professor Toksöz showed us the opening scene of the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest, held in İstanbul. She made us focus on the opposition between the singer, Sertab Erener, who was dressed as a “European” woman, with blonde hairs and sensual dress, and the Dervishes Turners, dancing, with traditional costumes, in the background. This contradiction, in her opinion, symbolized the self-identification of Turkey in that period: “one step east, one step west”. As the last point, we considered the theme of science fiction and its connection to international relations. Sci-fi, as a literary genre, allows the author to contextualize current day events in a distant future, escaping political correctness and sensitivity and giving the writer the chance of being bolder in critiquing it. This is particularly interesting, in the prospect of international relations, because, often, many of the organizations which are described are similar to the current state of affairs, or are a representation of the past political structures of human history. For example, we can find “empires”, as in “Star Wars”, or “confederations”, as in “Star Trek”. In addition, themes that can also easily be found are: the use of violence to gain power, the exploitation of resources, colonization, militarization and environmental, or nuclear, disaster. To conclude, the lecture held by professor Itir Toksöz provided the students with an interesting and peculiar point of view on the international relations, in particular, she proved to us that the academic research can include also topics considered “not-strictly” relevant for international relations, as for example science fiction.

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