

Guest lectures Masaryk University, Brno

November 2018

- Cinema and conflict relations: the Kurdish case
- Gender, sexuality and film: audience and critics perspectives
- Diaspora and media: concepts and cases
- Vernacular media of conflict
- Refugees and visual culture
- Phd seminar

Disentangling
media and conflict
relations through the Kurdish
conflict in Turkey

Guest lecture Masaryk University Brno, November 2018

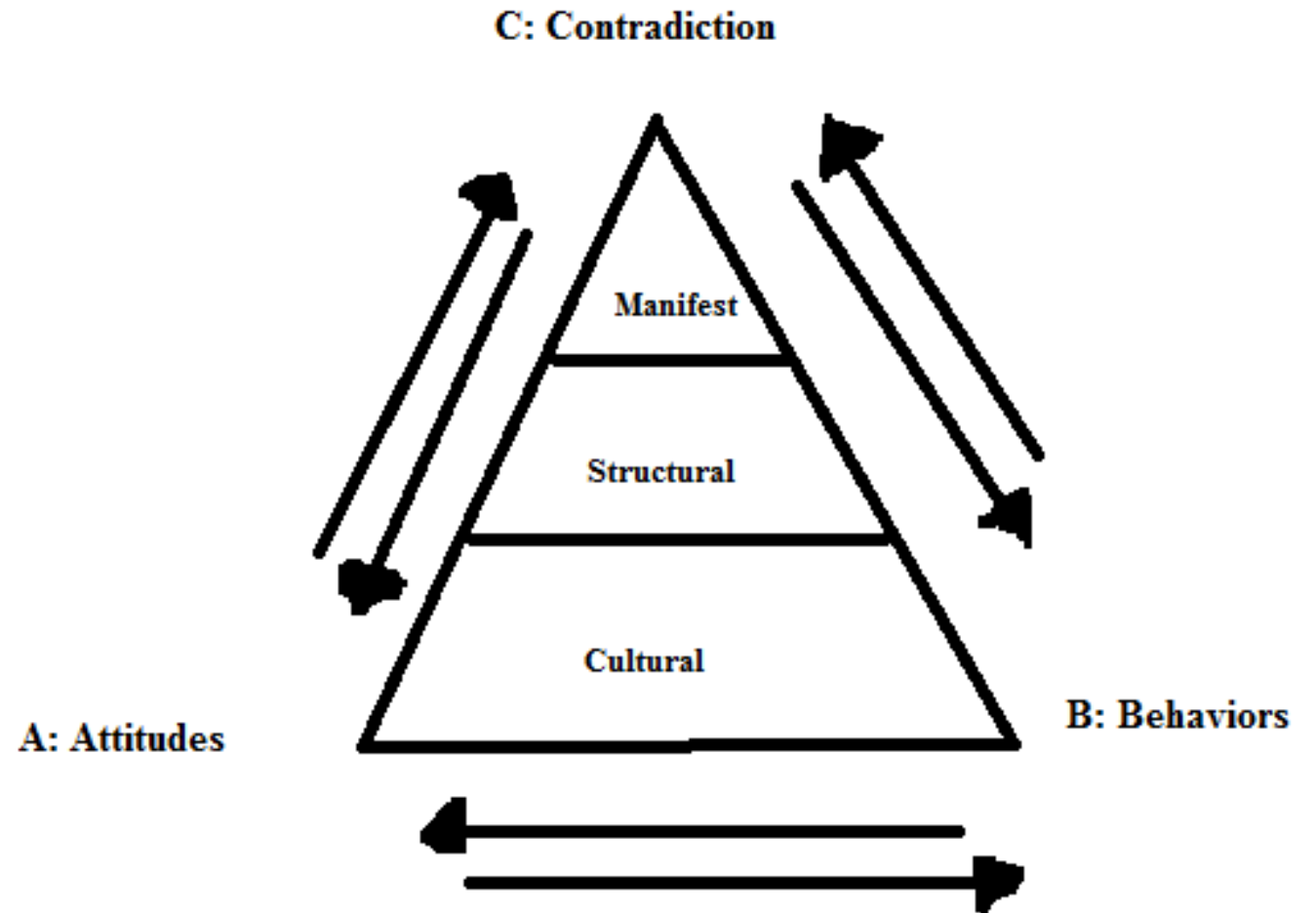
Prof. dr. Kevin Smets (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)





Understanding conflict

- Johan Galtung: from cultural conflict to structural and manifest conflict
- Dimensions
 - Duration
 - Scale
 - De-territorialisation



Intractable conflicts as a type of conflict

- Daniel Bar-Tal; Louis Kriesberg
- Intractable conflicts
 - Long (at least a generation)
 - Institutionalized
 - Shape collective identities
 - Antagonistic
 - Culture of violence
 - Commemoration and ritualization
- Are not necessarily between national, ethnic or religious groups
 - Also cultural conflicts

Media and (intractable) conflicts: major relations

- Mediation and mediatization → visibility and agenda-setting
 - “The CNN effect”
- Media support the circulation of particular conflict narratives
 - Media wars: the war over the dominant narrative
- Media support a culture of opposition, animosity and collective identity
 - Regimes of representation
- (Social) media offer possibilities to challenge all of the above
 - Alternative public spheres

Studying media and (intractable) conflicts

- Traditionally the domain of journalism, TV news
 - Representation, reporting, agenda-setting
- Increasingly: social media
 - Revolutions, social movements



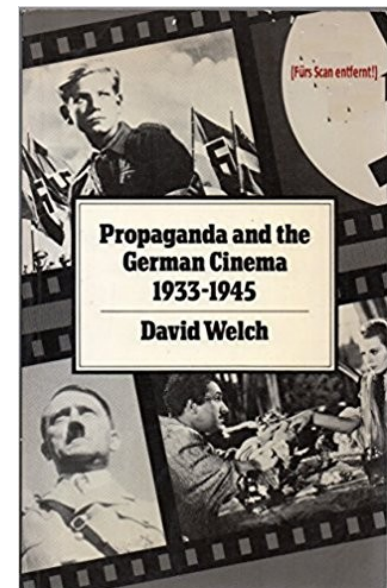
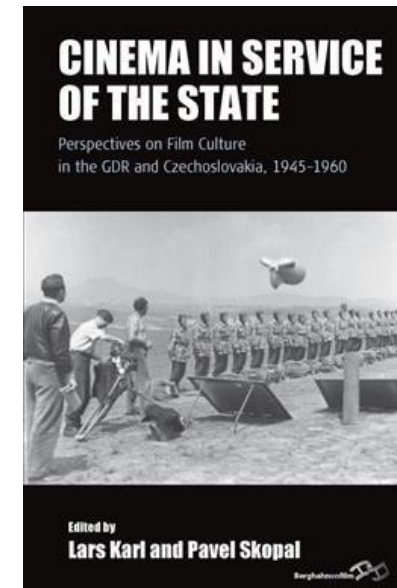


Film and conflict

- Distinctive element: fiction and narration
- Creative process = selection
 - Selective representation of history
 - A version of past or on-going facts
- National cinema and identity
 - Collective identity and the cultural canon
- Popular entertainment
 - Mobilizing power of the masses



Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein (1925)

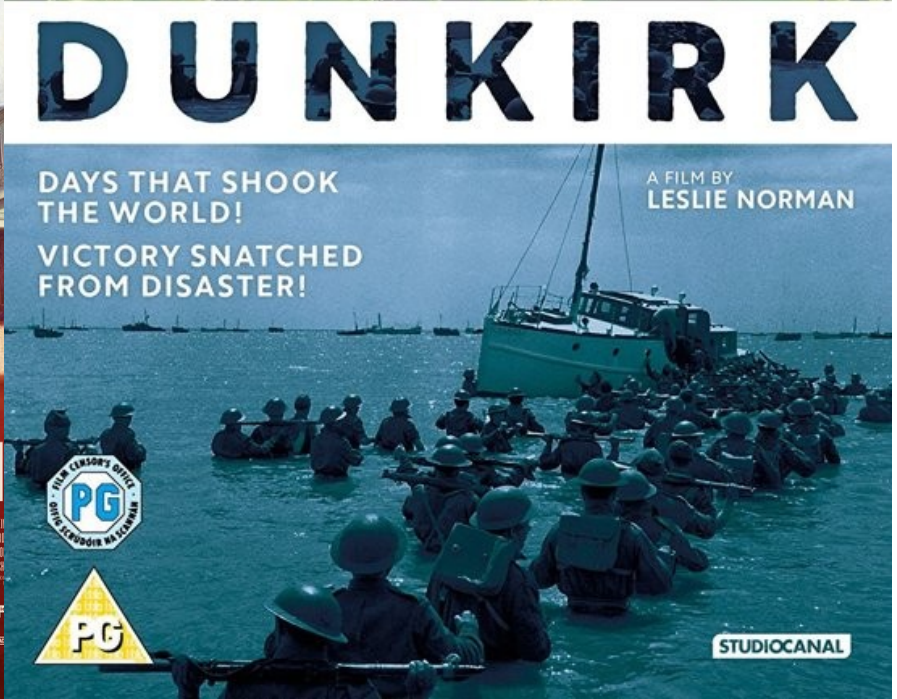
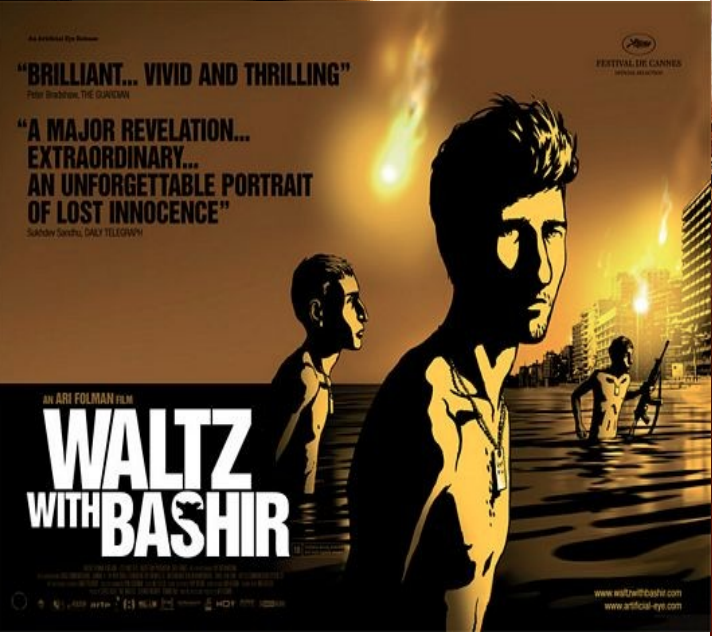


Film and conflict: main concepts and approaches

- Third Cinema (*Terer Cine*) and revolutionary cinema
 - South America and Cuba 1960-70s
- Diasporic and exilic cinema
 - Cultural conflicts and individual experiences
- World cinema and the spectacle of suffering
 - Poverty porn
- Cinema and trauma
 - Metaphoric and allegoric processing



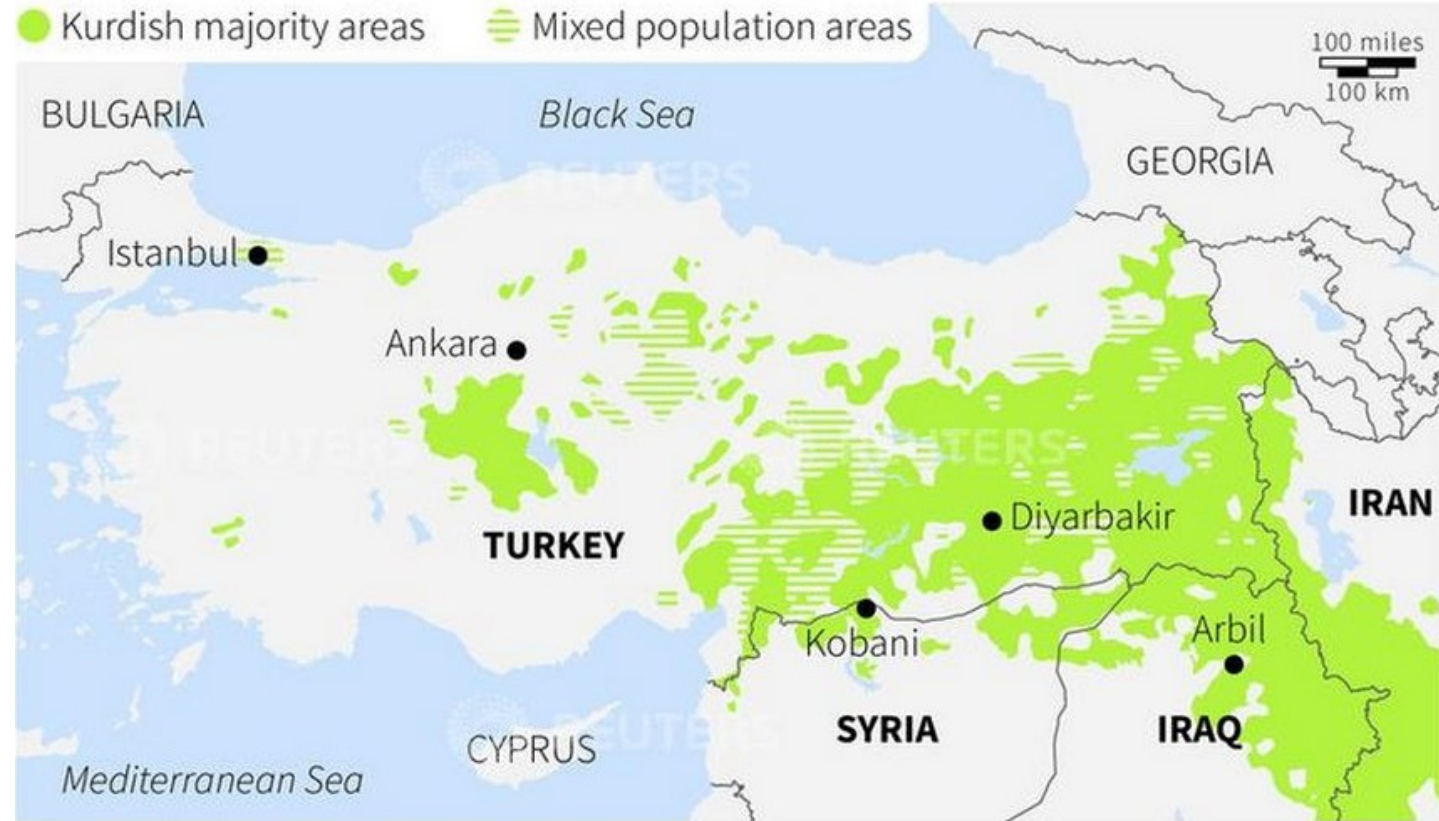
Gojira, Ishirô Honda, 1954





Source: Kurdish Academy of Language

Kurdish conflict in Turkey



Sources: M. Izady – Gulf/2000 Project; Columbia University.

Staff, 07/10/2014

Kurdish conflict in Turkey

- Background: Turkish nationalism and Turkification of the Republic
 - 1978 PKK
- “Linguicide” (Tove Skutknabb-Kangas)
- Diasporic activism and role of the EU
- Kurdish satellite television (see second part of the lecture)

Kurdish cinema (1)

- Difficult to demarcate
- A few iconic and influential filmmakers: [Yilmaz Güney](#) (*The Road*, 1982), Nizamettin Ariç (*A Song for Beko*, 1992), Bahman Ghobadi (*A Time for Drunken Horses*, 2000)



Kurdish cinema (2)

- Symbolic and emancipatory character
 - As an alternative to stereotypical representations in mainstream media
 - Undoing the “symbolic annihilation” of Kurds
- Develops within transnational space and “circuits of censorship”
 - Crucial role of exhibition and distribution
 - Film festivals
 - Regional differences
- Can become a diplomatic symbol
 - Cf. Palestinian cinema

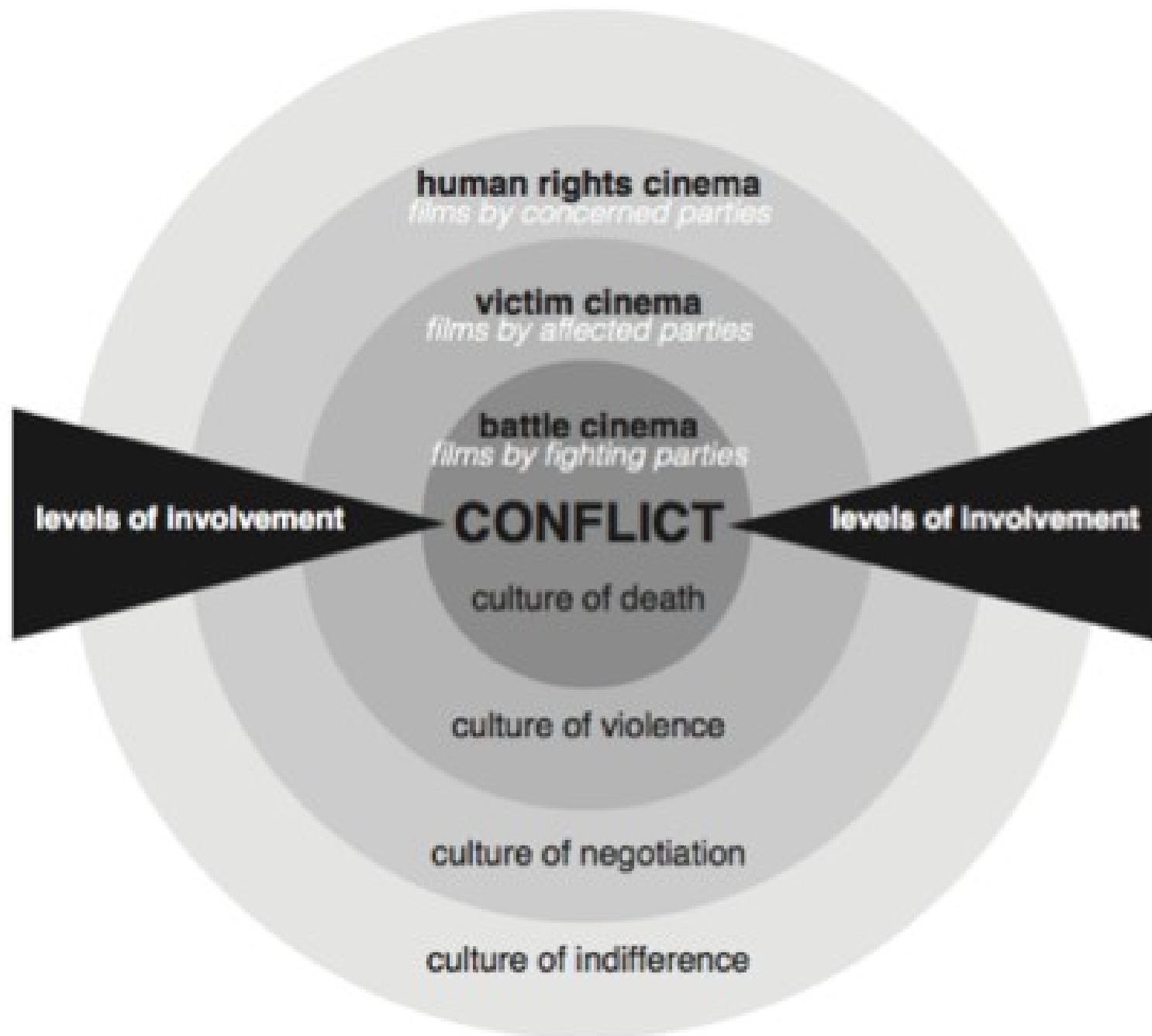


Kurdish cinema (3)

- Last 5-10 years: exponential growth
 - Professionalization
 - Cross-national collaborations
 - Role of children and women
 - Kurdish language productions (even in Turkey)
 - Exploring new genres
- Example: [*My Sweet Pepperland*](#) (2013, Huner Saleem, with Golshifteh Farahani)

Film and conflict: the “cinemas of conflict” approach

- See [Smets \(2015\)](#)
- Central variable: level of involvement and engagement of the filmmaker
- Always situated within a particular cultural context
 - Link conflict – identity – collective memory
 - Level of intractability of the conflict



Core layer: “Battle cinema”

- Cultural context: “culture of death”
- Films by fighting parties
- Limited technical qualities
- High degree of authenticity

Case of “battle cinema”: PKK film makers

- Halil Uysal / ‘Dağ’
- Autodidact (film theory)
- Film making as a mission
- Life stories and everyday lives of guerrilla fighters
- Become part of pro-Kurdish mediascape





[Excerpt from Tirej \(2002\) by Halil Dag](#)

British film-maker killed by Isis militants in Syria

Mehmet Aksoy, from London, was working as a press officer for Kurdish forces in Raqqa when military base was attacked



▲ Mehmet Aksoy, 32, who studied film-making at Goldsmiths University, travelled from the UK to Syria in July.

The Guardian, 27 September 2017

Second layer: “Victim cinema”

- More (physical) distance between filmmaker and fighting parties
- But a high degree of involvement
- Takes shape within a “culture of violence”: exposure to (consequences) of violent conflicts
- Less fixed in time and space
 - Echoes over generations and geographical distance
- Closely related to “accented”, diasporic or exilic cinema
 - Common themes of otherness, (symbolic) boundaries, ...

Case of “victim cinema”: films about Kurdish language and identity



İki Dil Bir Bavul (Orhan Eskiköy & Özgür Dogan 2008)



Annemin Şarkısı (Erol Mintaş, 2014)



Turtles can Fly (2004, Bahman Ghobadi)

Third layer: “human rights films”

- Films not by involved but by concerned parties
- A greater distance to the conflict
 - Abstraction
 - Often looking for different perspectives
- Human rights films
 - Universality and education
- Documentary aspect

Case of “human rights films”: documentaries on the Kurdish struggle

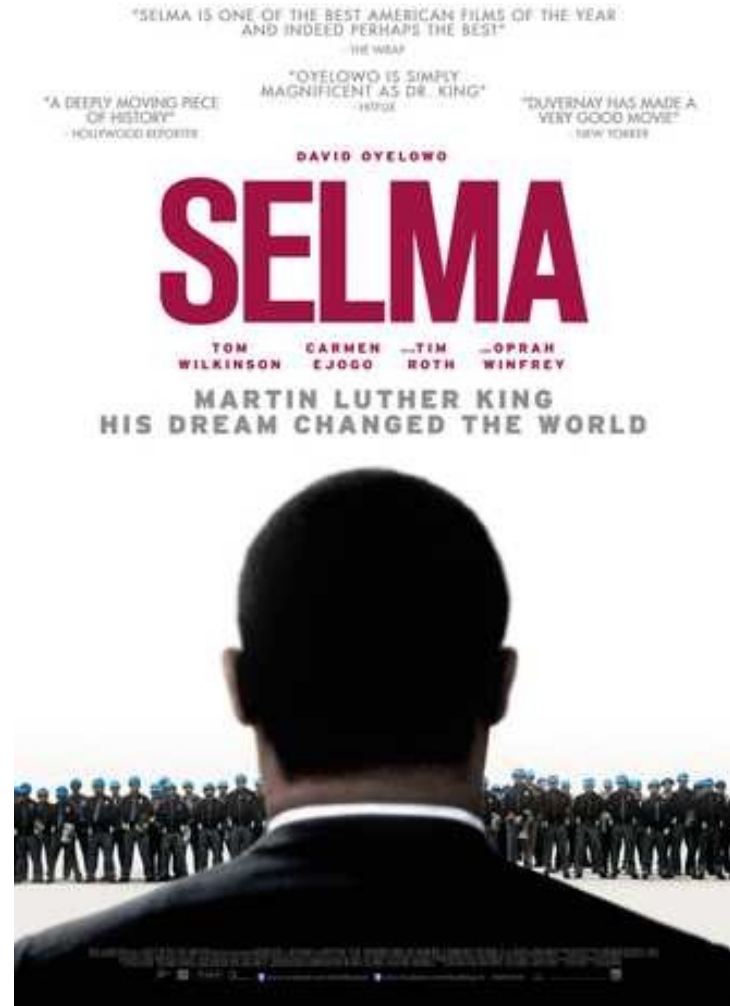
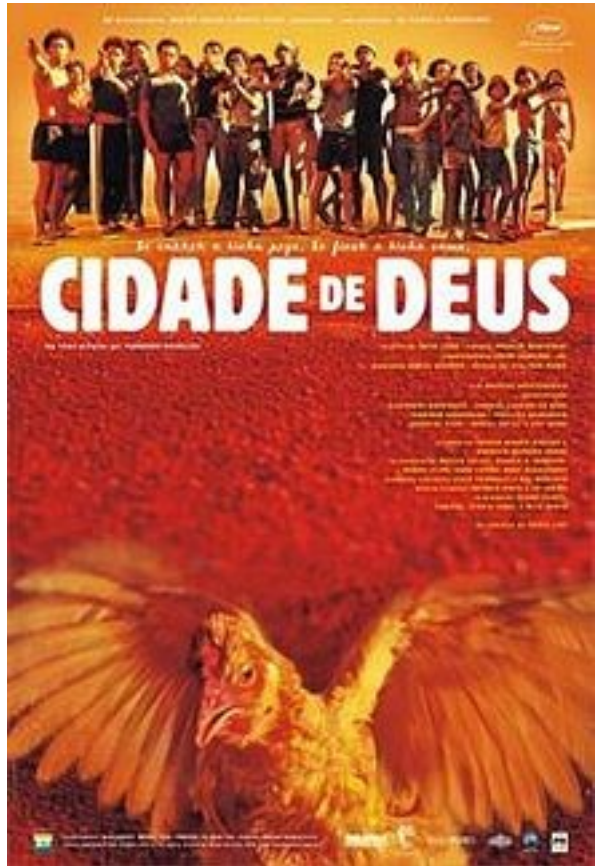


Close-up Kurdistan (Yüksel Yavuz 2007)

**Mano Khalil: Refugees are like you -
they have children, they cry, they
laugh**



Der Imker (Mano Khalil 2013)



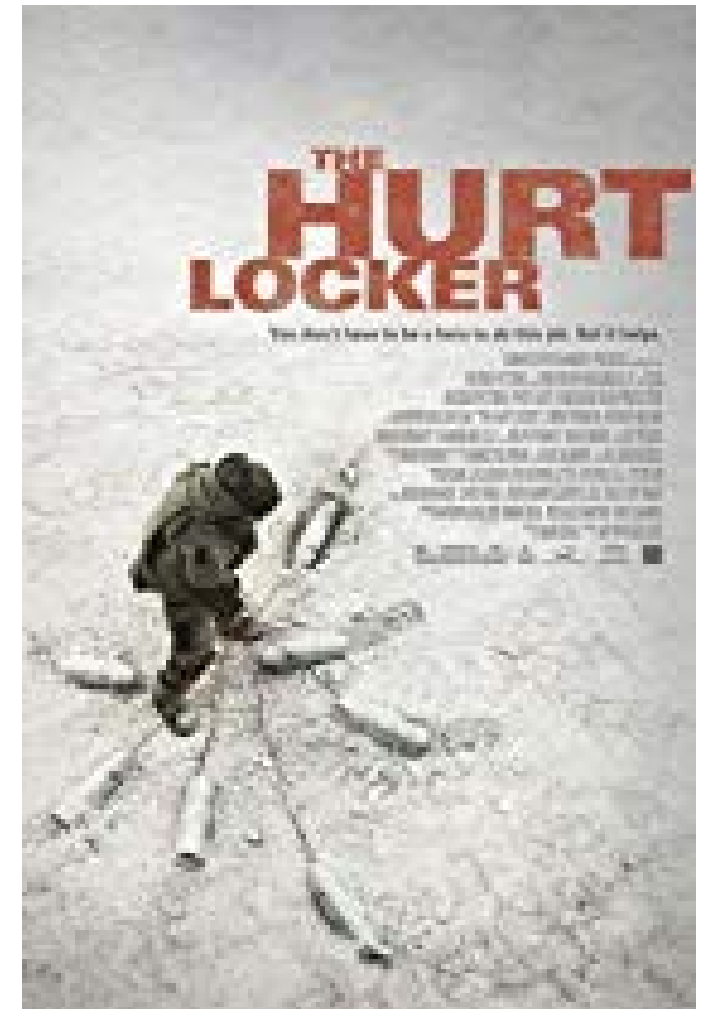
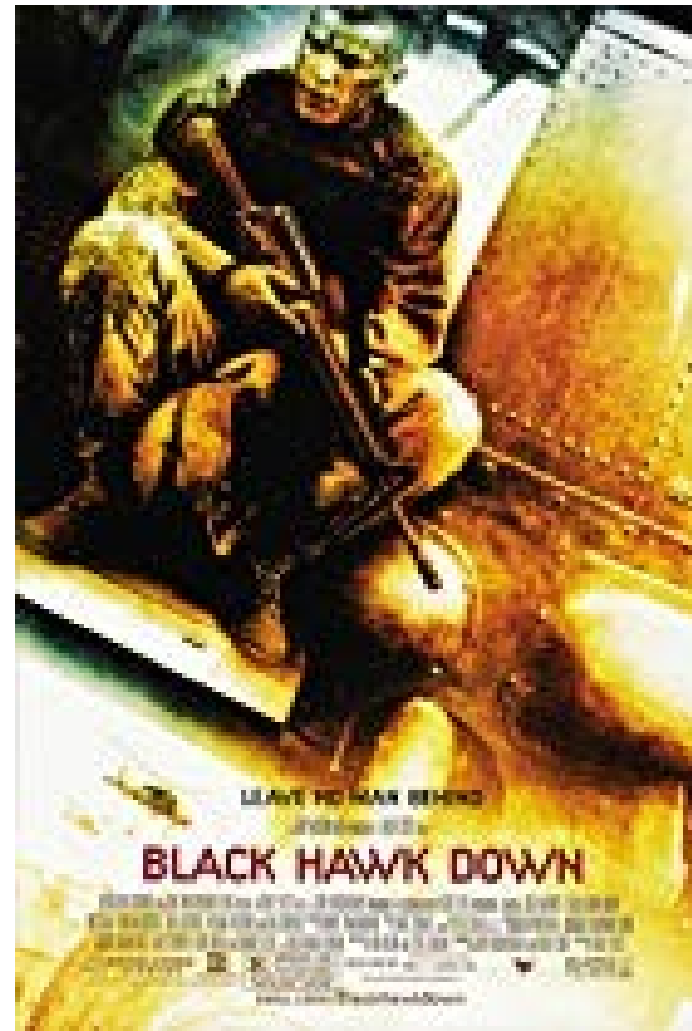
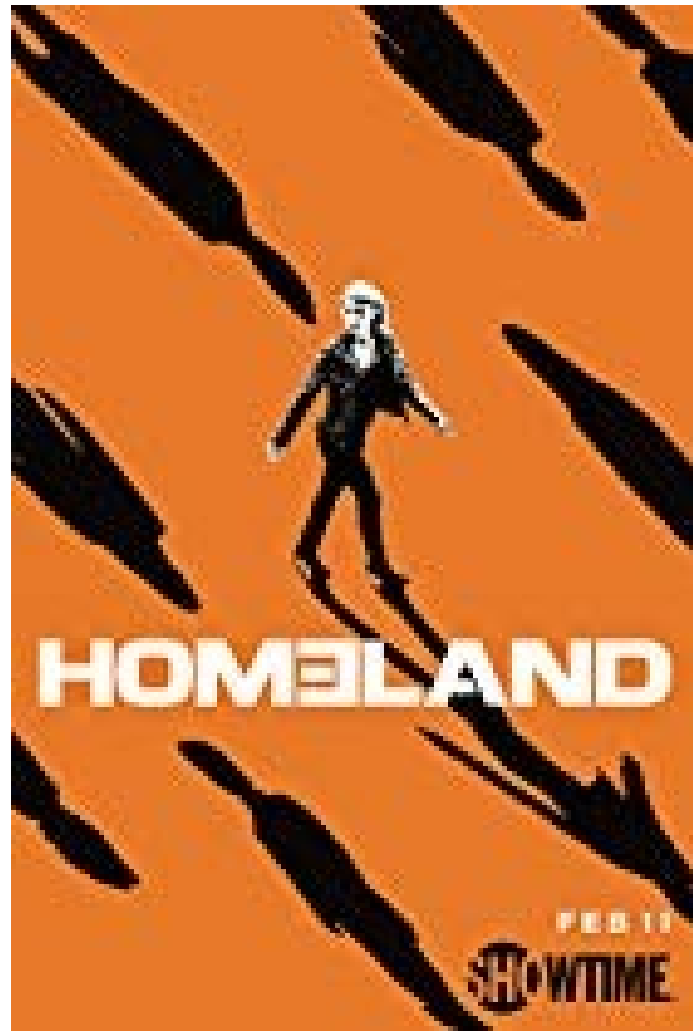
HUMAN RIGHTS
FILM FESTIVAL
BARCELONA
NEW YORK CITY · PARIS



HUMAN RIGHTS
FILM FESTIVAL
MADRID
FICTION / ANIMATION / DOCUMENTARY

The outer layer: "Cinema of indifference"

- The culture of indifference
 - Conflicts as inherent part of "exotic places"
- Disconnection between filmmaker and conflict
- Conflict as a décor for another story
 - Soldiers, journalists, romance, ...





Triage (Danis Tanovic 2009)

Case nr. 2: Kurdish satellite television

- Based on [Sinclair & Smets \(2014\)](#) and [Smets \(2016\)](#)
- Background
 - Certain media organizations or media expressions may touch on the core of cultural and political conflicts
 - Tensions between media freedoms / freedom of expression and national security
 - Extreme cases: prohibition of certain content or organizations
 - More subtle cases: indirect or self-censorship

Background: Kurdish minorities and media freedoms (1)

- Different histories in the 4 main countries
 - Iraqi Kurdistan after 1991 often the exception
- History of cultural (linguistic!) oppression
- Mass media were under state control for a long time
 - Promotion of dominant, official culture
- Hegemony has eroded, partly because of Kurdish satellite television

Background: Kurdish minorities and media freedoms (2)

- In 2000s Turkey : more relaxed position towards Kurdish minority (language) under influence of EU-Turkey membership negotiations (Copenhagen criteria)
- Kurdish-language channel by public broadcaster TRT
- Yet, in general, poor results when it comes to granting media freedoms to minorities
 - Restriction in the context of security threat

Kurdish transnational broadcasting

- First channel (Med-TV) 1994 UK, license revoked 1999
- Hassanpour (Kurdish scholar):
 - [Turkey viewed] “each satellite dish as a Kurdish flag hoisted on the rooftops of every building in the south-east”
 - Extra-territoriality of state sovereignty
- Coverage of the conflict, giving voice to PKK (leader Öcalan), but also promoting Kurdish culture (especially music)



Media freedoms versus diplomatic pressures

- Since mid-90s broadcasting licenses have been revoked multiple times in UK, Poland, France, Belgium, Denmark, ...
- Strong evidence for political and diplomatic pressures
 - Hosting Kurdish broadcasting seen as support to terrorism
- Evidence and speculation over involvement of different high-level politicians: Obama, Rasmussen, Blair, ... (see [Sinclair & Smets \(2014\)](#))



Discussion