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## Born from urgency: the western story about the Kurdish and the fabrication of an independent documentary

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## Abstract

This article is about the political discussion that permeates the West when the subject is the Kurdish (and the Middle East nations). Having as a starting point the documentary *Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS*, directed by Joey L., an independent director and photographer, this study deals with important concepts, like eurocentrism, orientalism and the question raised by Gayatri Spivak (2010): "Can the subaltern speak?". Besides these ideas, we approach notions of fabulation, the narration (as a historical document), the documentary language and its ethical dilemmas, the concept of border and periphery on movies and the exchange of information, all applied to the object analyzed here.

### Keywords

Documentary; Border cinema; Fabulation; Orientalism; Kurdish.

## Introduction

*Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS* (2017) is introduced as a material of documental, historical and social basis able to bring about important reflections, mainly for having been made independently, without having to be bound to the commonly distorted coverage of the traditional media. It is for the very reason of dealing with a rarely discussed matter that even the distribution of the movie was only possible due to independent political organizations that focus on the Kurdish community. The Committee of Solidarity to the Kurdish Popular Resistance in São Paulo explains that:

The subtitles in Portuguese were created by militants who collaborate in solidarity with the popular Kurdish resistance in Brazil. The intention is to support the dissemination and spread of the Kurdish fight in order to substantiate parameters of the ongoing revolutionary process in the Middle East, thus enlarging our basis of strategy and knowledge, keeping in mind the many local fights with which the Brazilian militance can have progress, both in knowledge and in practice. (Comitê, 2017).

It is high time to point out that, due to the independent and multimedia production of the documentary, the photographer and director Joey L published *We came from fire: photographs of Kurdistan's Armed Struggle Against ISIS* (2019), in which he perpetrates his experience along the shootings.

The Committee of Solidarity to the Kurdish Popular Resistance in São Paulo announced in 2017 that Joey L would start the presale of the film (nowadays it officially circulates), stating that this would drastically affect its distribution around the world. Thus, the presale became a means to promote both the consolidation of Joey L 's career as an independent multimedia professional and the debate on the Kurdish situation.

This article examines the political discussion about the Kurdish people that permeates the West and Middle East nations, having the documentary *Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS* (Joey L.) as a starting point. Our theoretical basis is rooted in the concepts of eurocentrism, orientalism and the question raised by Gayatri Spivak (2010): "Can the subaltern speak?". The study also approaches notions of fabulation; the narration as a historical document; the documental language and its ethical dilemmas; the concept of border and periphery on the movies; and the exchange of information- all applied to the object in question.

## The context and the political role of the documentary

The film *Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS*, written and directed by Joey Lawrence (who always signs his pieces of work as Joey L.) reports the fight of the Kurdish guerilla against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq on the frontline from a direct and participatory perspective. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account that in spite of showing a real, objective fact and having a strong connection with the evidence it shows, the documentary will always have an ambiguous discourse. Such ambiguity is inherent to the documentary due to its limitation: it is a specific point-of-view, thus, subjective. That is, a documentary is the representation of the event, not the event itself.

*Born From Urgency* is a continuation of *Guerrilla fighters of Kurdistan* (2015), another production by Joey L. It Lasts 60 minutes, presenting passages in general plan and via drone, which helps the visual contextualization of the places depicted. The film begins with images of a destructed city with voice-over narration in the first person – this maneuver, according to Bill Nichols (2005), makes the documentary similar to a diary or an essay, either with a testimonial spirit, that "passes on an attitude of civic importance (Nichols, 2005, p. 41) of the movie or with a partaker spirit. The partaker modality is predominant throughout the production; it "takes the filmmaker out of the position he was apart from those he represents and brings him into the group" (Nichols, 2005, p. 45). Joey L tells, while the place

is being presented: “Shengal, a city with no dwellers, only warfighters. The setting of a genocide. After fifteen months of internal battle involving ISIS militants and Kurdish forces, that’s what victory looks like”.

The director, frequently a character of the movie, explains some matters about the conflicts in these places, at the same time that we can listen to a soundtrack with a design similar to the design of the images shot (a constant and escalating tension tone). The setting is one of desolation.

Screenshot 1 – the city of Shengal (after the battles).



Source: frame from Born From Urgency.

Joey, who has not appeared on the documentary so far, becomes visible in front of the camera that he is operating himself. The director tells about the last time he was in the region and gives details of the war situation against ISIS. About the narrative in the first person, it is important to point out what Bill Nichols says:

The emphasis may be transferred from the attempt to persuade the audience of a determinate point of view/focus on an issue to the representation of a personal opinion, clearly subjective. The emphasis moves from persuasion to expression. The director’s personal point of view and singular perspective gains expression. The instrument that makes out of this event a documentary is the fact that such expression directed to the audience is still connected to the social and historical world. A big portion of the “new journalism” and the documentary movies influenced by it emphasize this combination of an idiosyncratic or personal voice with information about a specific affair. (Nichols, 2005, p. 41).

In order to reinforce the facts told in the first person, there are some reports from the *peshmergas*,<sup>1</sup> in which they specify military strategies of the enemy (ISIS) and show the *yazidi*<sup>2</sup> people’s houses, destroyed by the explosions.

Let’s highlight the discussion approached by Andréa França:

With the dissolution of the national, ethnic, cultural, private and ideological frontiers – and the appearance of other frontiers, more camouflaged and subtle – new protagonists of the current movies and TV come to life. They are the helpless of the present. Refugees, survivors and underprivileged, immigrants, foreigners searching for a better life, desperate people who abandon their small piece of land and their cultural references. This is a recurrent theme in the movie of the 90s: the nomadism of those who search for opportunity, the wandering of the homeless, function-less,

<sup>1</sup> Kurdish army combatants. The term literally means “he who faces death” (Mello, 2017, p. 169).

<sup>2</sup> The yazidis “unit precepts of the Persian zoroastrianism, of the sufism, mystical branch of islamism and of christianism” (Mello, 2017, p. 171). They were victims of many oppressions during history and they are still stalked by ISIS. In one of the scenes of the documentary, a yazidis citizen tells about the genocide on August 2014 while walking in the region attacked again in 2017.

undocumented, country-less (França, 2003, p. 13).

Andréa França asks some appropriate questions when she analyzes a group of films, which she names as constituents of a border cinema: (1) How do these new characters stand out in the images? (2) How do the emerging helpless become subjects within a discourse about marginalized countries? (3) What are the new audiovisual representations of the people banned by the many phenomena of globalization? (4) How do these films create sensitivity to the relationship between ethnicity and internationalization? To conclude the questioning, the author states that “Yes, the movie exists to talk about the world, the ongoing world crises, to think about them.” França (2003, p. 15).

There is a need for analyzing França’s (2003) questioning in order to reflect on *Born From Urgency*. In which way are the Kurdish starring the production? Is it a documentary that encourages the widespread of the fight itself, of counter hegemonic contributions, or is it a production that perpetuates the occidental oppression of the “underling” peoples, according to the eurocentric point-of-view? What languages does the director use to approach this matter?

The director spins 360 degrees and says: “Take a look at this place! Totally devastated!” at the moment that he films himself (in a selfie). The soundtrack goes along the scene with the same dramatic esthetic, more reports and voice-over narratives are added and there is audiovisual reference to Joey L’s documentary *Guerrilla fighters of Kurdistan* (2015). In *Born From Urgency*, some images of the 2015 documentary are shown. Among them, there is an explosion a few kilometers away from where the scenes were being shot. During the shooting of the new documentary, the director is on the very same spot of the explosion that took place in 2015. Joey L is accompanied by a *fixer*<sup>3</sup>, who confirms that that is indeed the place. Despite the scenery and the tragic situation, Joey L, the *fixer* and some *peshmergas* talked about what happened very casually, celebrating that they were not on that spot in 2015.

Joey L does voice-over to give more information about the Kurdish, having as background the soundtrack and images overflying the mountainous region. “The Kurdish are considered the world’s largest ethnic group without their own country.” The director explains the geographical and political issues involved in the matter while passages of the place and some of his photographs that depict such a nation without a territory are shown. He goes on: “In the USA, the right wing love these Kurdish groups because they fight against ISIS and always have a gun beside them”. Then, the documentary shows scenes of the director working, either capturing an image or taking pictures of Kurdish women, as in a making off. Such a scene is repeatedly shown throughout the film intercalated with pictures, recent passages, archive footage and selfie shootings.

Such maneuver works as a metalinguistic device, not only when Joey L makes use of parts of his own productions, but also in terms of a formal fragmentation that corroborates the filmic discourse. It is a reflective operation that demonstrates that Joey L’s involvement with the Kurdish fight is beyond *Born From Urgency*. In fact, it is an effort to register and bring about a number of affairs very rarely discussed in the West.

Thus, Joey points out a critical matter: the idealization of the Kurdish woman in the western world. The western media presents events related to the Kurdish community either in the terrorism point of view or in the fashion point of view, objectifying the woman’s body. This is a fact or relevance when the concept of orientalism is approached.

Edward Said defines orientalism as “a way of resolving the West, which is in a special place occupied by the West in the European western experience” (Said, 1990, p. 13). That is, Europe and the colonized West consider the West an “idea, personality and experience of contrast” in the point of view

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<sup>3</sup> Fixer: a local who works as translator, sometimes driver, but mainly as a cultural meter. Acquainted with the regional politics and the people, they help the journalist understand the context of the situations. “Without them, the journalist is nothing but a misinformed tourist” (Mello, 2017, p. 27).

of subordination. This point of view triggers definitions of exoticism and embedment of the Other as “primitive, savage or native” (Said, 1990, p. 13).

Since such relationship is a clear manifestation of mastery and political power, the latter perceived in stories and both in hegemonic theoretical and practical material,

The orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the proper organized institution to negotiate with the West – negotiate with the West by making statements about it, authorizing opinions about it, describing it, colonizing it, governing it: in short, the orientalism as an western style to dominate, restructure and have authority over the West. (...). European culture gained power and identity in parallel to the West, that was a kind of substitute identity, even subterranean, illegal. (Said, 1990, p. 15).

This collective notion that “identifies the European ‘we’ from all ‘the others’, who are not European” (1990, p. 19) makes it possible to understand the eurocentrism. Amin (2021, p. 11) explains that the capitalist neoliberal logic, which began in Europe and is found in countries it colonized (the same countries that perpetuate the hegemony), suggests to anyone to “copying the western model as the only solution to the challenges of our times”. The authors of this research utterly disagree with the effectiveness of this logic.

The contradictions of this regime, which are blurred by the eurocentric ideology at all costs, are suffocated by the motto “copy the West, the biggest world of the worlds” (Amin, 2021, p. 16). The accomplishment of such intent is obtained through the orientalist discourse in science, in the means of communication, in the arts and in every manifestation of human activity in the capitalist developed world, the center of the worldwide capitalist system. Nowadays, this center consists of “Occidental Europe, North America, Japan and some other nations (Australia, New Zealand and Israel), in opposition to the periphery (Latin America and the West Indies, Africa and the democratic socialist Asia, except Japan.)” (p. 17). It is important to point out the reason why the term eurocentrism is still in use, even though it reaches countries from different continents:

Nonetheless, supposing we substituted the word eurocentrism for western-centrism (accepting the common definition of eurocentrism), we would lose track of cases like Latin America or Japan, denying the European origin of the capitalist culture. On second thought, “eurocentrism” expresses well what it means to express. (Amin, 2021, p. 17).

The definition leads us to the ideas of global center/periphery and south/north, once the focus of this article resides not on geographical discrepancies, but on the evaluation of economical, cultural and hegemonic differences – treated as whole. The border cinema also draws up a survey of places, lands, borders, imagined communities and deterritorialization as a representation that goes beyond the physical location in the world map.

Amin (2021) explains why such definitions, geographical in the beginning, were analyzed under another perspective:

The criteria that allow defining the conditions of the parallel center/periphery, taken as one of the keys to this analysis, are located on the prevailing level of each one of the two social systems. As far as capitalism is concerned, the parallel center/periphery is defined in economic terms: on one side, the capitalist societies that are finished, dominant; on the other, the capitalist societies that are unfinished, dominated, behind the times. The economical prevalence (and its complement, the dependence) is a product of the worldwide spread of the capitalism “that really exists”. On the contrary, the center/periphery of the tributary society is not defined by economic relations - let alone in domination and economical dependence – they are characterized by the criterion finished/not finished of the formation of the state and the ideology. (...) The new European culture is reedited taking into consideration a myth that opposes a supposed European geographic continuation to the world in the south of the Mediterranean, that becomes the new frontier center/periphery. All eurocentrism

resides in this mythical construction. (Amin, 2021, p. 26 e 28).

The author's ideas meet Andréa França's method to evaluate the products of the border cinema. She states:

A selection of films from countries so different and directors from countries so disparate may seem strange, but as mentioned before, the objective was to analyze the images, the sounds and the narratives of regions that are "losers" (regions threatened by the new disposition of the global order), study the way the cinema has been elaborating a discourse about the new ways of life, of thinking, of types of work, of sociability, of intolerance and of subjection. There is evidence shown by these images: the emergence of a new voice and a new face to set another aesthetic and political subjectivity up, a new human capital as the subject of the cinema discourse (França, 2003, p. 16).

Back to the documentary, at the same time that the director takes pictures of the *peshmergas*, he comments: "if you look beyond the pages of the magazine, you'll see that the women are real fighters who live and die for the cause, not objects for an ad."

Screenshot 2 – Kurdish fighter photographed by Joey L.



Source: frame from Born From Urgency.

The importance of women in Kurdish society was conceptualized by Helen Pessuto (2017) and already approached in detail by Mello *et al.* (2022) in terms of audiovisual representation.

With more images of the Kurdish in combat and a tense soundtrack, the director asks the audience: "What is an exploratory photographer like me doing among guerrillas?". He explains that the first trip was made with the objective of covering the events, but he later realized that he had barely begun to scratch the surface of the matter.

After contextualizing and explaining the matter, the director makes jokes at the same time that he takes a video of himself among debris: "this is the passage in which I walk in style when there is an explosion behind me and I ignore it". The way Joey expresses himself reinforces the informal tone of the documentary in many moments, regardless of social and political problems, multiple kinds of violence and armed confrontations the movie depicts.

Joey appears again taking pictures of Kurdish women. In the following moment, the *peshmergas* tell that they took over the place where they are now (Shengal)<sup>4</sup> from *ISIS* and are still defending it. Another combatant explains that they have to take all possible precautionary measures to stop the members of

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<sup>4</sup> Also known as Sinjar, Shengal is a city in the North of Iraq, near the Sinjar Mountains and the frontier with the Syriam Kurdish (Rojava).

*ISIS*, because they may appear unexpectedly, even disguised as dwellers. This report is made while some intimate atmosphere scenes are shown, like one in which everyone is gathered around the firebone. In this passage, after the exposition about the territorial defense, the scenes are on the hospitality of the Kurdish guerrilla fighters with Joey, as if he were part of the group or an ordinary guest (this is a valid definition, taking into account the director's experience with this group in the production of his first documentary (*Guerrilla fighters of Kurdistan*, 2015)).

After that, the movie shows a *yazidi* boy who tells about the destruction of the Islamic State. The director and the boy walked on the street where he resided until there was an attack that made the Kurdish abandon their houses and migrate somewhere else to survive. The scenario is one of destruction. The *yazidi* boy shows the house he grew up in, where now there is only debris and remains from fire. Joey keeps shooting the interviewee's reactions while he examines the space, devastated. While he walks, the boy explains how the Kurdish army *PKK*<sup>5</sup> saved thousands of *yazidi* lives in the genocide on August 3rd, 2014. He says: "they were the only ones who helped us." Then, Joey reports that the *PKK peshmergas* trained the *yazidi* for combat and went back to their own fights only when they understood the Kurdish were ready to battle. Joey makes the report while walking with the Kurdish guerrilla fighters.

Screenshot 3 - Yazidi boy in his house.



Source: frame from Born From Urgency.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to register the observation of the journalist Patrícia Campos Mello (2017, p. 135), who states that the *YPG* and the *YPJ*<sup>6</sup> were also responsible for rescuing the *yazidis*. This information indicates that more than one Kurdish organization helped save the *yazidis*.

The Yazidi boy compares the Kurdish army to *ISIS* and says that both treat the Kurdish with the same violence. After that, Joey adds: "all of them have already run from *ISIS*, but now it is the jihadists who run away from them". Next, Joey shows scenes of combat from the Kurdish point of view in which the Kurdish take the region over and plant their flag. There are *jihadists* corps on the floor. The director picks documents from their pockets and shows them, telling them their personal data, like name (fake or not), where they are from and so forth.

Joey L. explains the situation between Turkey and the Kurdish and the *ISIS*: there is an agreement between Turkey and Syria that facilitates the entrance of members of the *ISIS* in Turkish territory. As a

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<sup>5</sup> *PKK*: (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan - Karkeren Kurdistan Party): The Labour Party in Kurdistan, founded 1974 by Abdullah Öcalan, in Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> *YPG*: Popular Defense Units (Rojava Army, name of the Syrian Kurdistan), organization created in 2004 that became public in 2011. *YPJ*: Women Defense Units, (Rojava Women's Army), created in 2013. Both groups derive from the Democratic Union Party (*PYD*). Information given by the Committee of Solidarity to the Kurdish Popular Resistance in São Paulo (Comitê, 2017).



consequence, the *ihadists* “take care of” the Kurdish, decimating them, once they are a problem to the Turkish government. Still in a relaxed tone, Joey states that “in our western media, we like to refer to ISIS as if they were a villain from James Bond films.”

Spivak (2010) established that the subaltern’s and the colonized voices are mediated by somebody else, who doesn’t belong to their group. When he mentions subaltern subjects, Spivak is not referring to any random marginalized individual, but to people who are forced by the marked to live on the fringe of society. The author refers to the Kurdish, who are, in one way or another, hindered from political representation and the possibility of becoming a member of the dominant social class. After all, according to Slavoj Žižek (2015), even keeping their zones free and doing better in confrontations, “all they did was defend themselves, they never had an imperialist, aggressive attitude.”

Therefore, Spivak “unveils the scholar’s complicity and disturbing place of being entitled to speak for the other and construct a discourse of resistance”, as Sandra Almeida (2010, p. 12) defines. However, depending on how this discourse is constructed, the structures of power and oppression are repeated, either in a clear or in a subtle way. In *Born From Urgency*, the narrator is a director who doesn’t make part of such a community, even though the documentary has the objective of showing the Kurdish fight. Joey L is in the position of commentary, he is an intermediary. The director, who lives in the United States, is a Canadian citizen that is talking about a commonly unknown people to an audience that is part of the *western world*.

The situation demands that we consider the history of acts of violence carried out by the eurocentric world against the peoples of the Middle East for years – we are especially referring to the symbolic violence here (Bourdieu, 1997). Such attitude comes about with the reports that present through the narrative means “relations of domination and subordination, consciously or not (both to who has the power and to those who are in a subordinate position), as if they weren’t so rooted as to be almost invisible (Miranda, 2018, p. 27).

In the case of the documentary, the director positions himself as an external storyteller who is showing the Kurdish to the audience. Instead of considering the situation depicted as an example of the western exploitation, a question takes place: would not the Canadian-American director’s participation and focus be useful? After all, Joey L makes an effort not to reproduce hegemonically biased explanations; on the contrary, he highlights ideas confirmed by the Kurdish themselves, who go along with him as the movie is being shot. Besides, his audience will probably be from the West, which means that a cultural translation and a common language about some matters are useful, regardless of the inaccurate nature of a translation. This is a relevant example of the film fable: the exact reproduction of the real or, better yet, of the objective, the concrete, doesn’t happen. The real world is always mediated. Approaching and understanding a real story always takes place in a determined manner within the film fable.

They have their moments of leisure: the director shows to the Kurdish how a drone works. After that, Joey says that the place they are going to go in is not ruled by the Syrian government, but by the *YPG* and *YPJ* instead. They are in *Rojava*. He explains that, although they consider themselves independent, the *YPG* and *YPJ* are from the PKK, because they have emerged from Abdullah Öcalan’s ideology. Joey shows the region and says that any place without a battle like the one he is showing (protected by the *YPG* and *YPJ*) “makes you feel back to reality for a moment” and makes it possible to experiment with some kind of security. The Syrian Kurdish army is responsible for the management and defense of the region.

The women of the *YPJ* explain that Islam and the Koran are not like the *ISIS* broadcasts (in order to morally devalue the women, among other concepts wrongly perpetuated). They say that the meaning of being a muslim is beyond the stereotyped idea of the religion, mainly in the West. The *peshmergastalk* talk about the imposture of the *sharia*<sup>7</sup> (according to the *ISIS* interpretation) and laugh with Joey when they

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<sup>7</sup> Sharia: Muslim law that composes the faith derived from the Koran and the Hadith (the Hadith is a collection of Maomé’s words and acts that complements the Koran).

talk about faith and beliefs and they say that atheists like him would be “chopped into miniscule pieces”.

After that, the members of the *YPG* talk about the heterogeneity among them: there are Arabs, Kurdishes and people from different ethnicities and doctrines. They explain that there are many people against *ISIS*: the Christians, the Arabs, the Kurdisches, the Muslims, and so forth. Then, Joey shows a tank made out of recycled material, highlighting the need of creativity in the organization of the battle, for there is an embargo which allows them to use only resources from that region. The same emphasis is applied when some guns belonging to the defense groups are shown and some stories about them are told. These guns and most war equipment have come from *ISIS*: after a battle, the Kurdish take them from the dead *ihadists*. The lack of structure and support becomes evident when situations like these are shown and commented on in the documentary.

Screenshot 4 – The director participating in a Kurdish meeting.



Source: frame from *Born From Urgency*.

Joey L. films himself having tea with the Kurdish and says that, above all else, “we have tea, to remember our principles”, emphasizing the use of the first person plural. Next, scenes of tension are exhibited, in which a suicide car comes toward the group and explodes in a safe distance. According to Nichols (2005, p. 46), “When they use ‘we’ that includes the filmmaker, these films achieve a level of intimacy that can be pretty emotional.”

The director takes advantage of the event to explain how the mind of a member of *ISIS* works: they are taught that such attempts against their own lives are worthy, because there is a much better existence on “the other side”. Thus, the Islamic State also incentivizes the filming of the bomb attacks as a means to glorify them, says Joey L. “Nothing can be compared to the eternal paradise that awaits for them in the afterlife”, the director adds, referring to the reasoning imposed on a member of the *Daesh*. With the widespread of the discourse, mainly on the internet, *ISIS* presents “an unfortunately successful formula in some cases, specially in the poor muslim communities in the periphery of European big cities” (Apolloni, 2015).

The voyage goes on and, while passing by Kobane, Syria, Joey delineates that the city is “now famous because of the destruction caused by *ISIS* while the world just watched”, pointing out the Kurdish’s critical geopolitical situation, ignored by the world power and the international players. When they are not ignored, regardless of the fact that the Kurdish are the major responsible for the combat against *ISIS*, the Kurdish are called terrorists by the western commercial media and government authorities, mainly by the USA, that already used them to defeat the Islamic State. Interesting as it may seem, the *ISIS* defeat is good for all European countries.

Among pictures, soundtracks, narrations in *voice-over*, passages of events and registers of

guerrilla fighters during their combat routines, Joey L. declares his position about the conflicts not only as an individual, but also as a professional:

As an independent photographer who knows when a project is over and it is time to go home, I must admit that particularly on this occasion I was very guilty while I was packing to leave. I can come home and go back as many times as necessary while these combatants promise not to retreat. The war debris that they defend with their lives may be the only wall keeping ISIS apart from their families, but they are acting like a shield to the world. (Born, 2017).

The documentary is finalized inside Joey's apartment, in New York, where he lives. While some images of Joey developing the pictures he took during the shooting are shown, he does voice-over to tell:

At the moment I sat down to record these narrations, safe at home, more combatants in the frontline could be losing their lives. It's difficult not to stay humble. Some may think it is weird to find a light of a secular reformation in the core of such a brutal sectarian conflict. One can say that this is the last place in the world where you could find such a thing, but this is exactly how new ideas are formed. They are born from urgency. They are the fire that destroyed this region and changed everything. ISIS divided these movements, but the growing faith has always united them again. It is clear that everything may collapse tomorrow. These groups are tested with tasks that are more difficult than battling, the worst of them being to transcend the ethnic, the religious differences and historical heritage. It is impossible to preview which way this erratic war will take. When ISIS is gone, the real war may be just beginning. It seems that the destroyers of history will have to silence the latest authors of world history. (Born, 2017).

Such positioning, defined by Nichols as institutional discourse - "he speaks about them to us" (2005, p. 44) -, displays a gap between who speaks and who watches. "The movie, addressed to us, (...) is directed to a subject who is also apart from us, even being next to us." (2005, p. 44). This type of documentary frequently has commentaries in "voice-over, maybe even a narrator with God's voice, a masculine bass voice" (2005, p. 44), that "informs us about some aspect of the world in an impersonal way, but trustworthy." (2005, p. 44). In the end, Nichols explains that the result of such positioning is that "we all should watch the film, once it supposes that we want or need to know the matter it deals with." (2005, p. 44).

Screenshot 5 - Joey L. in his New York apartment



Source: frame from Born From Urgency.

The conclusion about Joey L's work is related to Maria Aparecida Baccega's reflection on narratives like this one, for "we have already acknowledged other facts that happen in our small universe

or the ones that happen away from it – and amplifying this universe is an important role of the means of communication – through reports.” (1998, p. 9). Therefore, the technology, the media available nowadays and the current model of information exchange have a direct influence on how these stories are spread.

Yet, what is the impact of this type of documentary, once it is kept aside by the traditional movie, no matter its extreme relevance in many contexts?

Well, these films not only make emerge this mass of excluded-wanderers, but also promote (not all of them, just some) the possibility of other worlds and other ways of life, in a desire of experimentation that creates new languages, beyond the narrative principles of the traditional action movies (causality, temporal-spatial unit, etc) (França, 2003, p. 17).

The author still claims that providing visibility alone to a people or culture is not effective enough, for we are always exposed to images in newspapers, magazines, cinema and other mediatic sources. The visibility already exists in a way, even though the Kurdish are presented as “forgotten, helpless and caricatured, being qualified as real” (França, 2006, p. 398). So,

It is necessary to create through the cinema and the images new lands, new nations, new communities where they do not even exist. It's important to make it clear that these new lands are not geographic; they are affective, sensitive territories, new maps of belongings and translocal affiliation. Creation here doesn't mean only making fiction movies, because there are many fiction films that do not have any fictional inventiveness. Creation means breaking the ordinary regime of an image parade as well as the association of words to things, stopping the mechanized system of acknowledging and feeling, escaping from the cultural consensus. (França, 2006, p. 398).

Such images, according to Ângela Marques' interpretation of Didi-Huberman's ideas, can act as promoters of sensitivities. “It is as if we said: in a given context this is what we can see and, as a consequence, what we can think about. (Marques, 2020, p. 23),” which introduces us to these peoples' so far unknown life. Such exercise of fabulation of new imaginaries “contradicts the concatenation of cause - effect, the previsibility, the relation between what would be predicted and what in fact happens” (Marques, 2020, p. 24).

## The report on the Kurdish in *Born From Urgency*.

The Kurdish situation is rarely debated in the western media and, when there is a debate, it is quite shallow. Besides approaching this theme in details, Joey L's documentary brings up reflections about its language, its relation with the region and societies depicted, as well as the globalized world (after all, the discussion is broad and concerns many international actors), and its role as an audiovisual product

Muniz Sodré (2008, p. 11) explains that the communication, which was “centralized, vertical and unidirectional” is nowadays based on the interactivity and multimedialism, characteristics to be observed in *Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS*, that comprises media like photography, audio and vídeo in different styles within the same product. Such a product is made independently of the traditional media (in terms of viability and exposure, once the documentary was available on the internet since the beginning) and with total participation of the director in the narrative.

Sodré (2008, p. 11) points out that the technology called “post-mediatic” makes information about the globalized world and the intense flow of capital possible, although globalization doesn't have “universal power of standardizing”, once the investments are concentrated in determinate regions of the world. About the distribution of capital and information, Sodré claims:

In the market, the word information covers a variety of forms (films, news, sounds, images, digits etc), defined as “sources of data”, categorized from the economic point

of view as products. Mutation, which favors the enlarged and hasty exchange among nations, is imposed on this last kind of information. There is no longer the fear – typical of the 60's and 70's - of the destruction of the high culture by a supposed final homogenization through mass culture, once the limits between both are blurred in the face of globalization or of the so called society of information, unresponsive to whatever not related to velocity of its process of distribution of capital and messages (Sodré, 2008, p. 12).

In this context, the way the society of information works also comprises the concept of time. Due to the acceleration of the flow of data, as well as their storage in large amounts, new communication channels and “the illusion of human ubiquity” come up (Sodré, 2008, p. 14). Such ubiquity (or omnipresence) connects with Thompson's idea of mediated visibility. The author comments:

On the way of mediated visibility, the visible spectrum is no longer restricted to spatial-temporal characteristics of the here and now; instead, it molds itself by the distinctive characteristics of the communication media, by a series of social and technical aspects (like câmera angulations, editing processes and organizational interests and priorities) and by new possible ways of interaction made possible by media (Thompson, 2008, p. 21).

The new interactions, promoted by the communication media, “amplify” or “compress” time and present special characteristics that are different from face to face contact. Therefore, it is possible to “interact with people who do not share the same spatial-temporal referent” (Thompson, 2008, p. 18), which brings us to another dimension of reality. New ways of thinking, perceiving and measuring the real come about, as declares Sodré:

Boosted by the microelectronic and computer science or informatics, the nanotechnology of information introduces the elements of the real time (instantaneous, simultaneous and global communication) and of the virtual places (designing of artificial and interactive environments), making other worlds, other regimes of visibility possible. (Sodré, 2008, p. 16).

Given the new ways of “acting and interacting” and the new perceptions on the spatial-temporal matter, Thompson (2008, p. 20) points out that a “non local type of knowledge” starts to exist, that is more and more reachable to many media users who “can incorporate it in a reflexive way to their processes of personal reconstruction”. Once individuals are more able to absorb information and symbolic content from distant sources that are not part of their daily life, it is possible to resume the experience of Joey L's documentary, from the point of view of those who watch it on the internet.

Bosi complements the discussion defining the character of the “report” (as in the piece *Born From Urgency*, that presents itself as the author's documental report), a potential creator of stereotypes, for the reason that:

We get to know some people, some things, some parts of landscapes, streets, some books. We witness some facts, but we do not witness most of the facts we talk about. Yet, we trust people who lived and were present in these facts, and the thought and the daily discourse that feed on such social confidence. (Bosi, 2003, p. 115).

Such registers will, in the future, carry out the role of historical documents, that is, of memory by means of these images. According to Ângela Marques, even being representations and not precise derivations of reality,

(...) Listening to a narrative is taking part in it too, reimagining the other's experience from your own expectations, combining elements of the story received with your own. This is the reason why the image is of utmost importance as a means of knowing the subjective experience of the other. (...) Maybe this perception has something to pass on to the social sciences and to the studies of communication about the importance

of the image as an element that can bring to the researcher a better understanding of specific communication situations on the subjectivation of the historical conditions in which we are inserted (Marques, 2020, p. 11 e 12).

In this context, although diverging from Marques, Jacques Rancière's reflection about the gender *documentary* is interesting:

What is a memory? What is the documentary, as a kind of fiction? Let's start with some evidence that looks like a paradox to some. A memory is not a set of reminders of the consciousness, because, if it were, the very idea of collective memory would lack meaning. A memory is a set, an arrangement of signs of fragments, of monuments. When the information is abundant, the memory should be superabundant. The present shows us that this is not the case. Information is not memory. It does not accumulate for the memory, it only works for its own benefit. And its interest is that everything be forgotten immediately, so that the only abstract truth of the present persists and that its power as the only thing adequate to this truth be reinforced. The more facts, the more the feeling of their indifferent uniformity is reinforced; besides, more developed is their capacity of turning their endless juxtaposition into an impossibility of concluding, of reading the meaning of a story. In order to deny what happened, as the deniers show, it is not necessary to deny many facts; it is enough to take away from them, from the facts, the links that relate them and give them the consistency of a story. The realm of the present of the information rejects anything that escapes from the homogeneous and indifferent process of auto representation. The present is not happy to immediately reject anything in the past. It made the time of doubt out of the past. Thus, memory must be made out of both the superabundance of information and the lack of it. It should be a connection among the data, among testimonies of facts and traces of actions (Rancière, 2013, p. 159-160).

The author declares that "a 'documentary' movie is not opposite from a 'fiction movie', because it shows us images taken from our daily reality or archive documents about proven facts" (2013, p. 160). Yet, being the documentary about reality, it "can, in a better way than the said fiction movie, play with agreements and disagreements among narrative voices and series of old images, of variable origins and meaning. Thus,

It can unite the power of printing, the power of the word, that is born from the union of the mutism of the machine and the silence of things with the power of editing – in the wide meaning, not technical – that builds a story and a meaning for the right that is given to freely combine the significances, to review the images, the concatenate them differently, to restrain or widen its capacity of sense and expression. (Rancière, 2013, p. 163).

We come to the definition of *report*, according to Walter Lippmann, who affirms that it is "a product made in conjunction by the connoisseur and the acknowledged in which the role of the observer is always selective and generally creative" (Lippmann, 1970, p. 150).

Thus, "the facts that we generally see depend on the position we are and on the habits of our eyes" (Lippmann, 1970, p. 150), which is directly connected to concepts like social formations, pre-established values and stereotypes to which we all are subjected "as if the perception of things were, other than a reception, a construction, a task about the world" (Bosi, 2003, p. 115).

## Final remarks

Searching for an apology for what has happened to the Kurdish, their fights and historical and geopolitical contextualization in the most objective and trustworthy way possible (although all reports are contaminated by the subjectivity of who makes them, as approached in the discussion), *Born From Urgency: Faces from the Frontline Against ISIS* consists of a piece of work influenced by the new mediatic connections and how the society of information works.

At this point, França (2003, p. 15) questions the type of production the film fits in:

Inserted, included, consumed and generally well accepted in the national and international theatrical exhibition, wouldn't there be a risk of being watched by the audience as simply a part of the current mediatic show with an emphasis on a different, distant unknown marginalized?

Yet, The Committee of Solidarity to the Kurdish Popular Resistance in São Paulo answer the questions, declaring that in *Born From Urgency*:

The journalistic rigor is of high standard when it comes to matters like the yazidi genocide, explanations on the women's army (YPJ) and the Jineology (Kurdish feminist science). This rigor denounces the complicity of the State of Turkey with ISIS during the Syrian War. (...) Free from the customary embarrassment of the traditional media, he was able to convey a profoundly personal view of what is happening in this region. (Comitê, 2017).

The same committee declares that Joey L. allows Kurdish men and women "talk for themselves during a pretty long extent of the film, making distances shorter and breaking physical and ideological barriers" (Comitê, 2017). Although we do not completely agree with such affirmation – as shown with Spivak (2010) – even if directed by an western citizen, the documentary differs from all the others that have an imperialist point of view on the Kurdish and the Middle East. As an example, we could cite that, instead of approaching the Islamic State from a blaming point of view, which is most commonly done, Joey L addresses the subject with a historical and personal background. He could defend the western democracy as superior, but he does not. On the contrary, the director proves himself as conscious of the cause and the many international actors involved in this complex affair.

The documentary, which is run in a rhythm of alternation between the director's considerations and shootings of the Kurdish, of the *ISIS*, of places and situations, has some nuances that we would hardly see in any traditional information material about the conflict. The director's aesthetic and narrative choices, like showing rituals of the ethnicity, the preparation of the food, the documents of dead *jihadists* and ordinary utensils (like a toothbrush left behind in a house destructed by the war) captivate the audience, that discover the human side of the story they would never see in traditional news or documentaries that did not use such resources. It is interesting to point out that in the process of humanizing the characters of the film, the photos included by the director between the passages and the narrations are quite responsible for this effect. After all, these images appear during descriptions and contextualization – to play the role of complement – to prove what is being said. Nevertheless, they do not only support the intense expressions in the faces depicted, they truly depict the experience the Kurdish suffer. It is possible to imagine what it means to be in their position helped by a sensorial link and, at the same time, informative.

Therefore, taking into account what the documentary proposes to present of the historical world (and to whom, considering that most of the audience is western), *Born From Urgency* has a contribution in an informative and subjective way to the spread of the fight and the disruption of stereotypes generally repeated in (hegemonic) European and/or American journalistic contexts.

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