

THE LAST IMAGE

Agnès Devictor – So, my job is to analyze images of war that have been shot mainly in Iran and Afghanistan, or should I say more widely in the Middle East, by national operators, to explore how, during a war, they film their war and how they represent themselves in war. My approach involves long viewing sessions with operators, combatants, mothers or brothers of martyrs.

About forty fictional war films were made during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war, and in addition to that, we had a lot of documentaries and TV films that were made, and we had that very special group that gathered around an architect, Morteza Avini, who said that for a real revolution to happen, you need to change your view, and to change your view you need to change the way you look at things, and to change the way you look at things, you must change your way to record things. He wanted to film in a new way. TV journalists arrive, shoot for fifteen minutes and then go home. To understand a reality, you have to stay, you have to listen without cutting off. And when war broke out in Iraq in September 1980, his teams were ready, his teams were working in the villages, and for him it was obvious that he had to go and shoot on the front line using this method. And here we have small groups of three or four people going to the front and staying there for months, filming, filming fatigue, filming daily life in the trenches, and what's interesting is that the director, Morteza Avini, edited the film from a distance, in Tehran, almost like an epiphany, that is to say, it was at the moment of editing that the film was going to reveal itself and to question what had been filmed. And he used to say, “I try to reveal the inner front line of the fighters, it's the inner jihad, it's the one they wage against their own fear, why they enlist, what they are looking for, how they live this war”, and what's particularly interesting is that Avini sometimes filmed himself editing the film, wondering about what he sees, and telling the viewer, “Careful, what you see here is not war... War is something else, it's invisible, don't be fooled, don't be trapped by the powers of the visible.”

In fact, this question of focusing on war images filmed in the course of wars, and especially by combatants, led me to ask myself the question of how the combatant groups under Iranian command today in Syria use images, knowing that the tools have completely changed. We have mobile phones, or small cameras, which have enabled fighters to film, to film themselves during offensives, but what is new in the history of war images – because we've always had fighters who made images, since World War I, we have millions of images made with cameras, Vest-Pockets, so the small, handy, concealable tool, we've had it for a century! What's interesting here, and for the first time, is that they can be disseminated on a massive scale from the battlefield, without going through the headquarters. And people will broadcast these images almost in real

time, or even use social networks to circulate them, and have access to the enemy's social networks! Then again, there is another image of war that will be filmed, with the particularity of trying to capture the moment of martyrdom, since many people tell me that they had their mobile phones permanently connected at the time of the last, ultimate offensives, so that the phone would film the moment when they would be chosen by God, so that at least there would be a last image for their family. So the mobile phone had this vocation too, to show war as a space almost like a holiday, a summer camp, with young people joking, taking selfies, laughing, and carrying mobile phones almost like a talisman in the face of death and hoping that in the end it won't be the case, but we have a lot of images where we see combatants trying to frame, to frame themselves in the process of fighting, in order to maybe not only say, I was there, but above all, to capture the last image.

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