

Vernacular media of conflict

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Article



Media and violent conflict: Halil Dağ, Kurdish insurgency, and the hybridity of vernacular cinema of conflict

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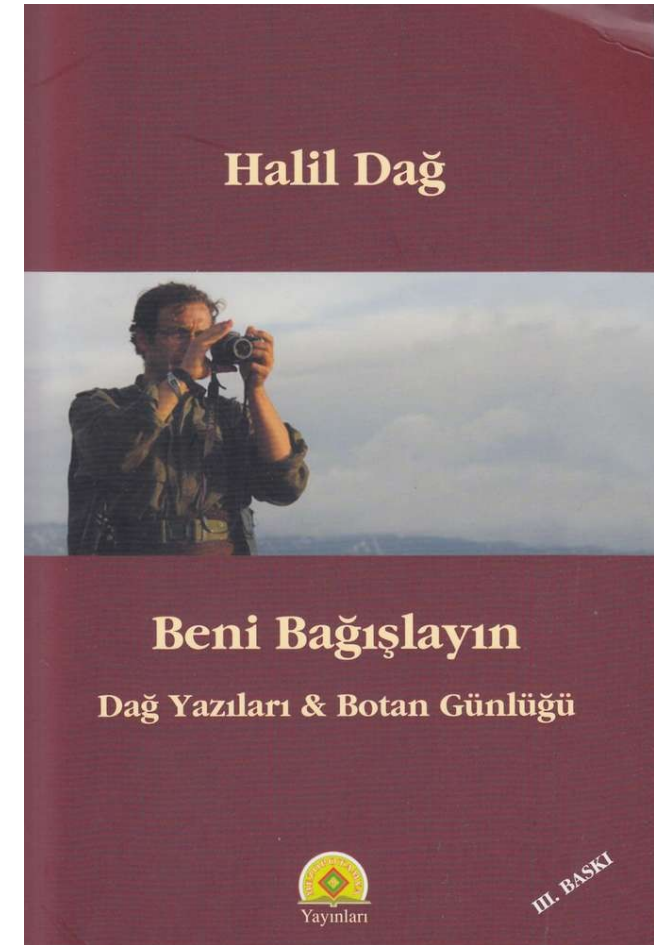
Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya

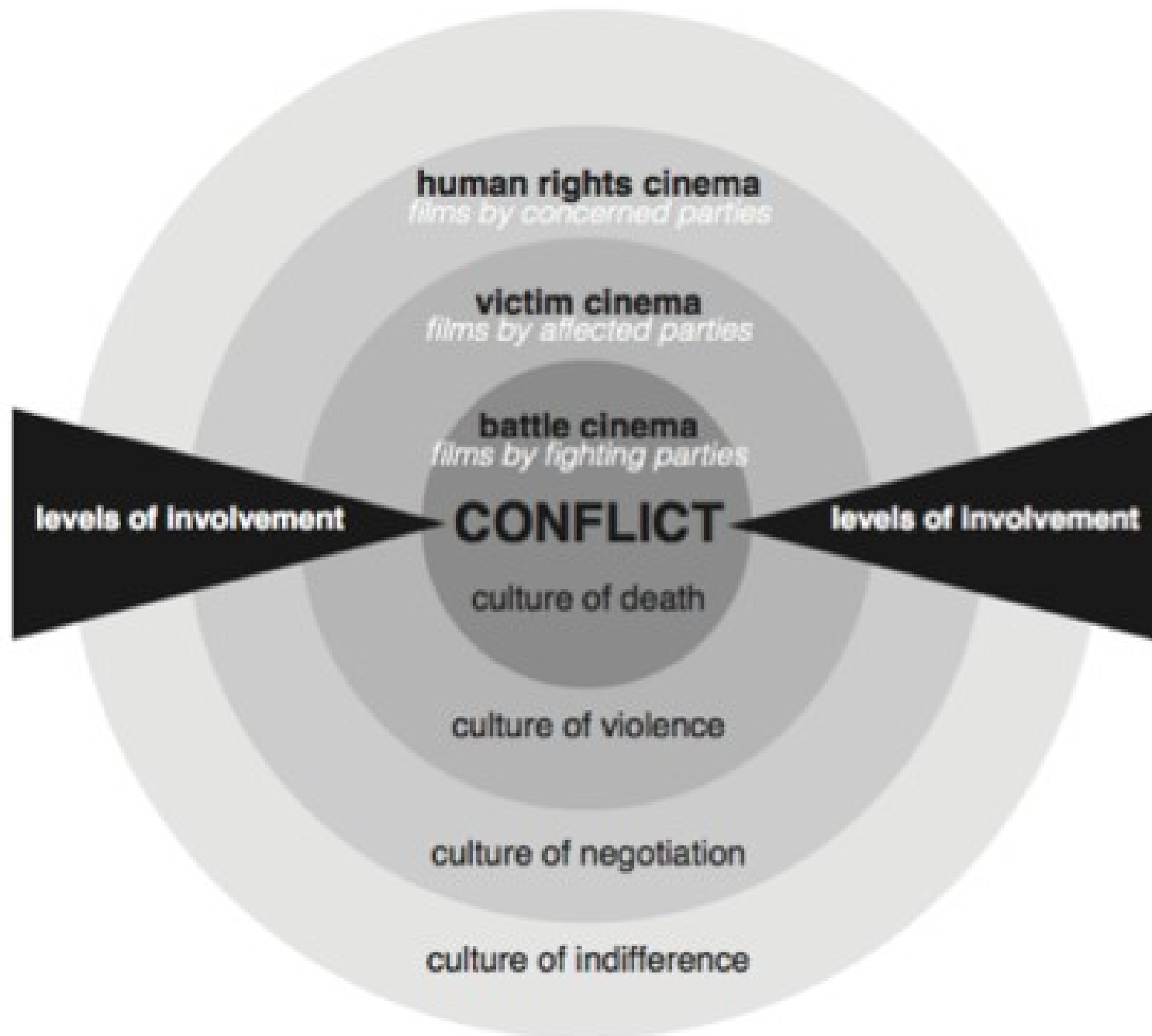
Ghent University, Belgium

[Smets & Akkaya \(2016\)](#)

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human rights cinema
films by concerned parties

victim cinema
films by affected parties

battle cinema
films by fighting parties

levels of involvement

CONFLICT

levels of involvement

culture of death

culture of violence

culture of negotiation

culture of indifference

Vernacular media of conflict: context

- Main themes in research
 - Framing, agenda setting, war photography
 - Media production ??
- Visual turn in conflict research
 - Visual aspects of hard and soft conflicts are increasingly important (Mirzoeff; Parry)



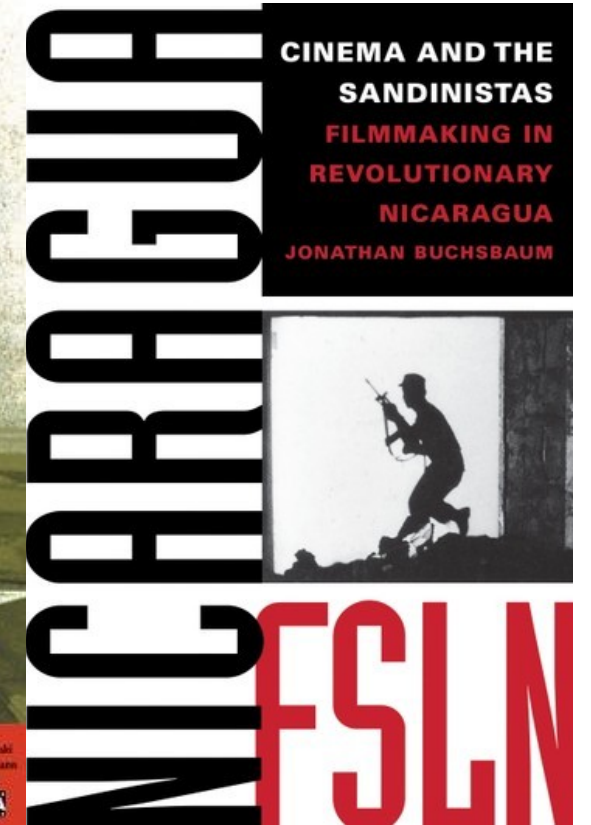
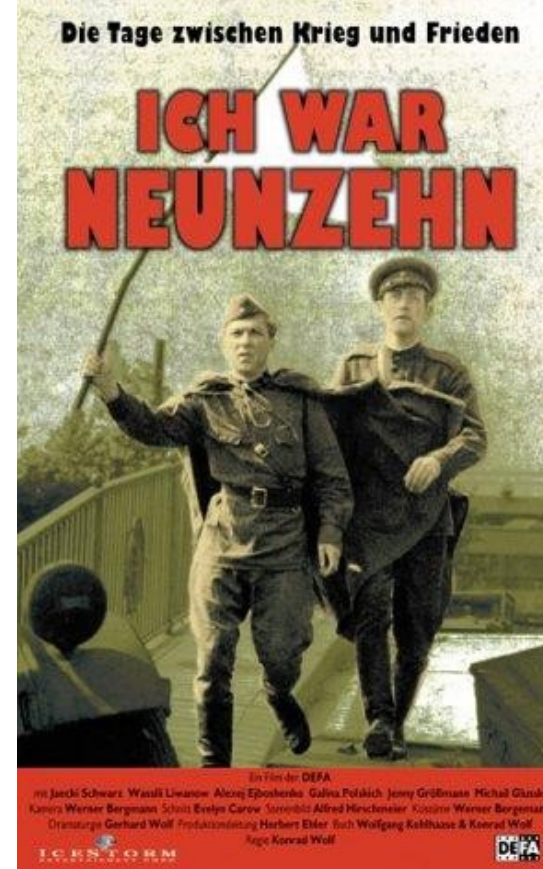
Vernacular media of conflict: context

- Increased attention for non-elite media producers (in conflict)
- Increasing volume of “vernacular media production in conflicts”
 - Blogs and vlogs by active duty soldiers
 - Citizen photo journalism during attacks
- => “raw” and “autonomous” media
- (Authenticity?)



Why cinema? (1)

- Exaggerated focus on social media blogs, vlogs etc?
- Connecting with a (little known) history of filmmakers involved in conflicts
 - Eg. East German director Konrad Wolf
 - Eg. Australian soldiers / amateur film makers during Vietnam War
 - Eg. Revolutionary movements that have employed cinema, for instance Nicaragua



Why cinema? (2)

- Film (still) very important propaganda tool during or “after” conflicts
 - Soviet cinema
 - Military-industrial complex Hollywood
 - Flames of War ISIS film

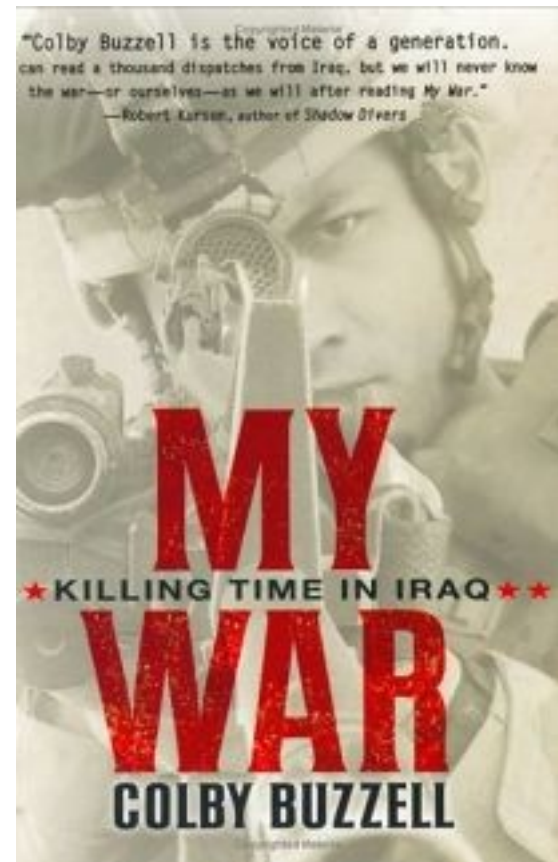


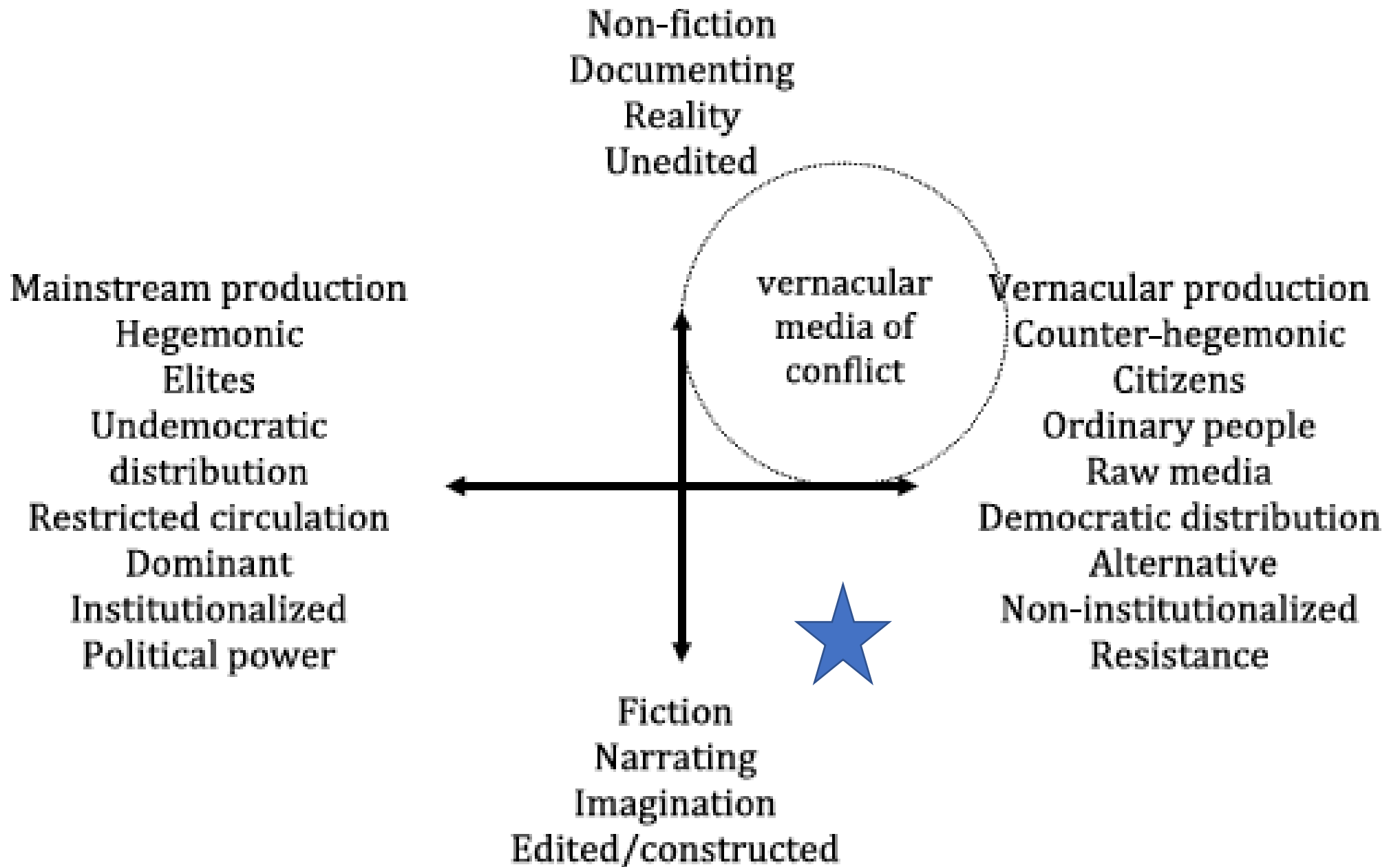
Conceptualizing “vernacular cinema of conflict”

- Going beyond dichotomy of elite versus amateurs
- Approaching these media not only as “conflict-supporting narratives” but also look at their production and cultural meanings
- Kurdish insurgent movement as a case study
 - Elaborate media landscape
- “The vernacular”
 - Counter-hegemonic, “specific”, “local”
 - Media studies: “vernacular creativity” on social media

Previous/recent research on conflict and vernacular media

- War on Terror and soldier-produced media: changing nature of media reporting in conflicts
- Vernacular productions by citizens in conflict zones: witnesses
- E.g. 'milblogs'





- Problematizing the alternative – mainstream divide
 - Alternative in terms of: Modes of production? Message? Audience?
 - Often Euro-centric bias for terms such as ‘citizen’, ‘journalism’, ‘participation’

Kurdish conflict in Turkey



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

Staff, 07/10/2014

The case of Halil Dağ: methods

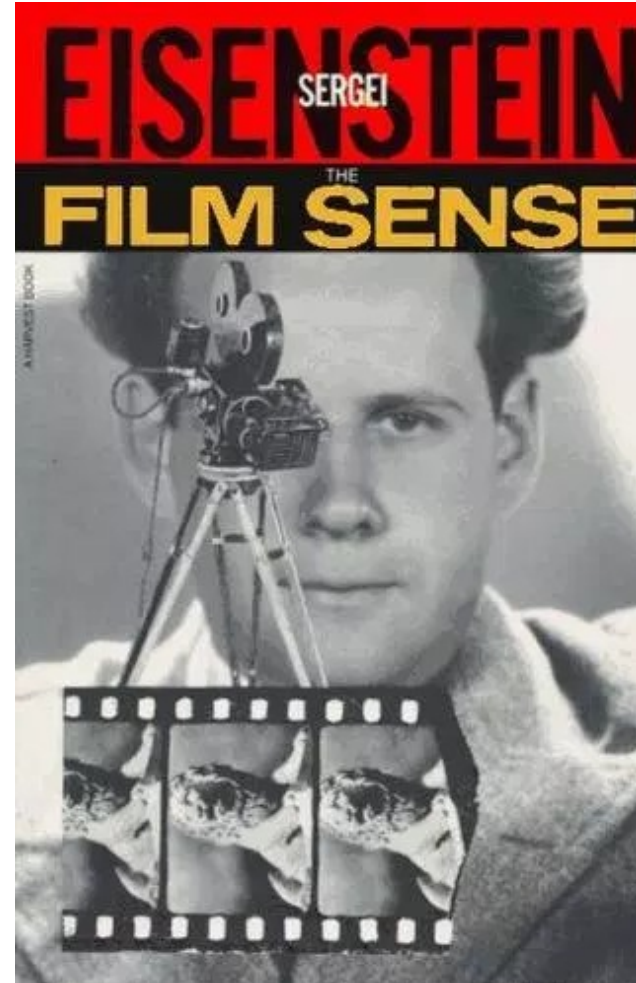
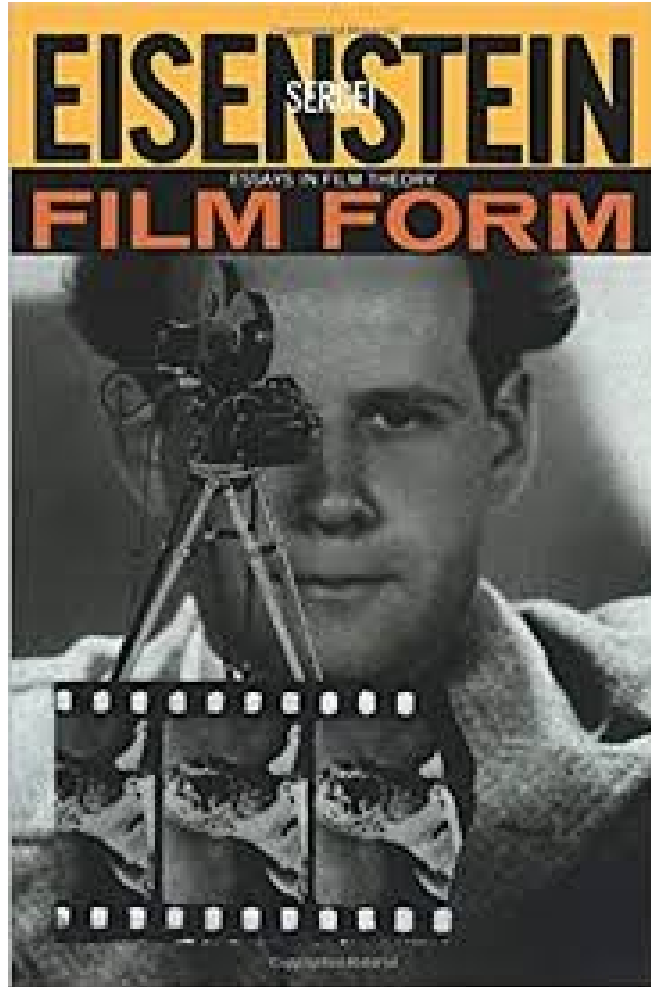
- Interviews
- Participant observations
- Auto-ethnography!
- Dağ's memoir
- Qualitative content analysis: narrative structure, symbolism, visual

Introducing Halil Dağ



“I decided to stay there and to go further after our interview with Abdullah Öcalan, which was a very meaningful work for me. I now remember very well that I had then decided to go further into the depths of the Middle East, not to return again. I was feeling that what I had been in search of until then was there, waiting for me. So I jumped into a geography about which I knew nothing, mingled freely with a people who I do not know at all, and I went to a country in which a language I do not understand any word is spoken.”

Inspired by film theory



Film making as a duty / personal struggle

- “I was timid for a long time since I was afraid of not working sufficiently on my stories [...]. However, I believed that I should start from somewhere and, in time, I would make the best of it. In this sense I had to give up my first stories. I still suffer from this. Therefore, I want to revive my [debut] film, *Tîrej*”

Mode of producing: “mountain cinema”



Film oeuvre

- Central theme: conflict, resistance, daily life of guerrilla fighters, women
- 6 films, between 29 and 162 minutes
- Hybrid between documentary and fiction
- Cinematic language
 - Symbols and allegories
 - Natural environment

A closer look

- Tirej
- Firmeskên Ava Zê
- Berîtan

Significance

- Historical documents
- Diversifying forms within the Kurdish mediascape
- Propaganda
- Inspiration



[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



Censorship claims overshadow Istanbul Film Festival

ISTANBUL



#DefendBakur