



# KinoFest

THE GERMAN FILM FESTIVAL



## FILM REVIEW: Republic of Silence

*By Princess Kinoc*

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### **Republic of Silence (2021) review: Unveiling the heart of the Syrian conflict through personal perspectives**

To say that Republic of Silence is easy to watch would be an understatement. I don't mean this in a bad way, it's just that given our current political climate, the feelings I have about this film hits very close to home.

Diana El Jairoudi's 2021 documentary does not follow the conformities of the usual styles of a linear narrative film. In 181 minutes (that's 3 hours and 2 minutes), we follow her 12-year journey depicting the Syrian conflict, in her point of view and the views of her fellow activists and her partner, filmmaker Orwa Nyrabia. As if clinging on to what little cinematic glory the war could be, she begins the film with a camera gifted by her father in the 80s. She also expresses that there are times when she would revert to a black screen with text to convey what her feelings are and what happens next, hinting that censorship has made its way into her life. It's amazing and courageous of her to often be able to show us what it was like on foot during the beginnings of Syria's civil war. She and her partner express different metaphors and visuals of what it feels like to be a Syrian refugee, living amidst a community that hasn't fully accepted it yet, as they both self-exiled themselves in Germany.

For those who have no idea when and how the Syrian conflict began, this may not be the film for you. In terms of changing perspectives, of understanding what it was like, then consider this film as ground zero before your research. The thoughts and visuals that El Jairoudi has gathered from her subjects and of her own views (although they may often be indirect) carry a weight that could be familiar to war victims. We see the inner turmoil, the desperation to escape and yet the invisible string that turns into anxieties of them wanting to free themselves and their fellow Syrians from the war is so frequent in this film that it is almost painful to watch.

Honestly, as her chosen subject is still a stressful event to deal with, I concur with other reviewers of this film that it may suffer viewership due to its running time and with the anxieties that the war might bring. But I insist, this is an important film to watch. The filmmakers' sincerity and their intent to examine the effects of war, of misunderstanding and cruelty towards other humans make this film an essential watch.

El Jairoudi's decision to use pieces of visuals and correlating each one together like a puzzle piece is a very interesting creative decision. It's as if we're looking at a three-hour dream (dreams do often happen in periods of hours), where there's hope and fear at the same time. Where one wishes it were only a dream. But again, we are reminded that this is not a dream. There was a time when her partner Nyrabia was missing, but we never get to see what happens next and how he was able to escape... only perhaps in a blissful scene towards the end when he snores and talks in his sleep that he somewhat describes what someone in prison could say.

The silence is deafening whenever we see and hear stories of war. Even celebrities that are encouraged to voice their opinions are often there for a moment, and then we never hear from them about their support afterwards. Republic of Silence is a powerful documentary that deserves much attention, but as we watch each scene unfold, it reminds us of how much we are all still prisoners of silence. Until then, when can we decide that the silence is too much?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Princess Kinoc is a freelance writer, and the current Editor-in-Chief for Film Police Reviews. She is also a member of the Society of Filipino Film Reviewers (SFFR) and the Society of Filipino Archivists for Film (SoFIA). Outside FPR, she has also written reviews and essays for New Durian Cinema and Pelikula Journal, and she co-hosts the Filipino film podcast, Third World Cinema Club. She is a black coffee drinker, and she's not so sure if that matters.