



Presents

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN



A film by YÜKSEL YAVUZ
Germany 2007
HD-Video, 104 Min.

A Production by Peter Stockhaus Filmproduction and mitosfilm, ARTE / WDR
Aided by Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig Holstein

Cinema start 6. December 2007

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CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

Crew

Direction and Script

YÜKSEL YAVUZ

Production

Peter Stockhaus Filmproduction

mîtosfilm / Mehmet Aktas

Editorial staff

ARTE / WDR

Dr. Sabine Rollberg

Cinematography

EMRE ERKMEN

Sound

BILGE BINGÜL

Music

Kardes Türküler, Aynur Dogan

Editing

ÖZGÜR TAN

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

Synopsis

In the documentary film CLOSE-UP-KURDISTAN the Kurdish director Yüksel Yavuz creates a connection between his personal story of immigration and the current situation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. In the film he makes a personal journey which takes him from Hamburg through Stockholm to Turkey, ending in the north of Iraq, in the refugee camp Maxmur in Iraqi Kurdistan. Throughout this journey he meets among others his parents and old friends, some of whom went to the mountains to become guerrilla fighters, others who fled the country and went into exile. The rest which were forced to stay in the homeland villages were persecuted and murdered, because they fought for justice and cultural freedom, which still doesn't exist in Turkey. One of the main protagonists is the intellectual Dr. Ismail Besikci who, because of his academic research on the Kurdish culture, had to spend 17 years in prison. Then there is Abdulkadir Aygan who fought as a counter-guerrilla in the `dirty war` against the Kurdish resistance. The role of the women during that period of anger and hatred is also defined very well, for example there is Berivan, who became a guerilla fighter and left her family to live and fight in the mountains. Although she knew that an arrest meant not only her death, but also humiliation and torture, she decided to become a member of the kurdish movement. The film makes a tight line-walk between political facts and personal stories and asks many questions: Why is Turkey not able to solve the Kurdish question? Why did a bloody civil war, where relatives and friends fought against each other, take place? How is the situation today? How will Turkey behave as a country in the ongoing negotiations with the European Union? It shows us that totalitarianism on both sides resulted in a senseless war that nearly destroyed the social and cultural diversity in Turkey. Like that, the film is also an attempt to bring the Kurdish people and the Turkish population together.

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

The Director



FILMOGRAPHY YÜKSEL YAVUZ

Born	1964 in Karakocan / Türkei
1970-80	General education in a Turkish boarding school in Karakoçan
1980	Immigration into the FRG in the context of family unification
1980/81	Attendance of the “Measure for vocational and social integration of young foreigners”
1982-83	Work in a meat- and sausage-factory
1984-86	Social and culture work (among other things cooperation at the publication of a migrant magazine, theatre work, jobs as waiter, interpreter/translator)
1986-90	Study of national economy and sociology at the University for Economics and Politics in Hamburg (Diploma)
since 1991	Preoccupation with films at various film productions
1992-97	Study of visual communication at the University for Plastic Arts in Hamburg (Diploma).

- 1994** **100 AND ONE MARK/ 100 UND EINE MARK**
(Doc.; 18 min; 16mm. NDR)
- 1994/95** **MY FATHER THE GUESTWORKER/ MEIN VATER DER
GASTARBEITER**
(Documentary Film; 52 min; 16 mm)
Special Documentary Film - 10. International Documentary
Film Festival Munich 1995
Best Documentary Film - 5. Turkish Filmtage Nuremberg
- 1997/98** **APRIL CHILDREN/ APRILKINDER**
(85 min.; 35mm) 1st Screenplay 1999
Audience Award – Film Festival- Max Ophüls Preis 1999
Special price from the Jury for the „Baden-Badener Tage“ of
The Television play in 1999,
Berlin & Beyond Film Festival,
San Fransisco First Feature Award,
January 2000 price for the best feature film at the Film Festival
Internazionale del Cinema di Salerno, November 2000
- 1999/2000** **THE MAN WITH THE WHITE COAT/ DER MANN MIT DEM
WEISSEN MANTEL**
(shortfilm; 15 min.; 35mm)
- 2002/2003** **LITTLE FREEDOM/ KLEINE FREIHEIT**
(Feature film; 100 min; 35mm)
Section „Quinzaine des Realisateurs“, Festival de Cannes
2003
Best Movie and Best Talented Young Actor - International
Film Festival Ankara 2003
Audience Award - International Film Festival Istanbul 2004
Best Script - Award of the union ver.di
Best Feature Film - Human Rights Award of Amnesty
International
- 2005** **CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN**
Documentary film in preperation
- 2006/2007** **CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN**
(Documentary film; 104:44min.; HDCam)
- MUTTERLAND**
Feature film in preperation

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

Background information on the Turkish-Kurdish conflict

The Ottoman empire as a multinational state from which today's Turkey arose, ruled from the 16th century on three continents: The Near East, North Africa and the Balkans. In the course of the establishment of the Turkish nation the first massacre in the history of mankind took place – the massacre against the Armenians. Even the Kurds were involved in it. Until today the genocide is still denied.

In 1923 the Kemalists under the direction of Atatürk ("father of the Turks") established a new secular republic oriented to the west. Its' basic ideals were "a state, a language, a religion, a nation". This led to the fact that not only Kurds had to suffer as the biggest minority. Other ethnic and religious minorities suffered under this foundation ideology as well. The Kurds' existence, their language and culture have been denied by the new men in charge. In consequence there have been many kurdish rebellions during the Twenties and Thirties of the 20th century. But all of them were bloodily put down.

The Kurds are one of the oldest folk of Mesopotamia. With a population of around 40 million people they still have neither a state nor an official status. Most of them, around 25 million, live in contemporary Turkey. Until a few years ago one wasn't allowed to call oneself a Kurd or speak their language in Turkey.

Under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan the PKK (Workers Party of Kurdistan), which was founded in 1978, began a guerrilla war in the kurdish parts of Turkey in August 1984. The war lasted until Öcalans detention in Kenya in February 1999. In the beginning the goal of the war was the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the east and south-east of Turkey. The military conflicts between the Kurdish guerrillas and the the Turkish Army reached their peak in the 1990s. Plenty of arrests and torture stood on the agenda. The security agency of the Turkish state abandoned every rule. In this part of the country a "dirty war" was waged. Unsolved murders, kidnapping of members of the opposition and tortures were the normal course of life. The country's media kept quiet about the violence which was committed by the military, the police and the para-military units of the state.

The "dirty war" lasted 14 years. According to unofficial sources 100.000 mostly young men fell victim to it. They came from both sides of the conflict. 5 million had to flee from their native cities and villages. Military operations in the Kurdish part of Turkey still continue.

In the meantime the PKK has abandoned their original goals. She pleads for a cultural autonomy of the Kurds and a political federalism which should hopefully be established in the course of the entry of Turkey into the European Union. Nevertheless still three to four thousand guerrillas stay on the Iranian border in the North of Irak waiting for a general amnesty and for a development in the Kurdish question.

After the occupation of the Iraq by the allied forces the Kurdish Regional Government was established in the North of Iraq. Its' capital is Arbil (Hewler). This development is considered as an important step towards the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Many Kurds from the European exile and former militants of the PKK who abandoned the organisation relocated themselves in the region. Many big refugee camps have been established there, e.g. the camp *Maxmur*. In contrast to the other parts of Iraq the Kurdish parts of the land are relatively secure and the economy flourishes enormously. But this has little effect on the daily life of the refugees in *Maxmur*. They neither have been acknowledged as refugees nor as citizens of the new Kurdish Regional Government. They wait for a political signal from Ankara. They still hope to return to their land close to the border between Turkey and Iraq and to rebuild their villages which have been destroyed by the Turkish army.

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

Interview with Yüksel Yavuz

The name of the film is "Close Up Kurdistan". What does this close-up mean to you personally?

As someone who was born and raised in Turkish-Kurdistan the "permanent war" has not gone past me – even though I live in Germany since 1980. Over the years I met many Kurdish refugees. Some of them were prosecuted Kurdish intellectuals, others close relatives who migrated to Europe, especially Germany. Nevertheless I always felt that we here in Europe do not know much about the dirty war in Turkish-Kurdistan. Most of the people in Europe and the rest of the world ignore the tragedy. Thus I wanted to take a closer look at the Turkish-Kurdish conflict to understand its dimensions.

How did you choose the protagonists of your film?

There are many facets of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. It affects everyone in the country, even abroad and here in Germany. I wanted to show a range of people who had to suffer under the conflict and still do. During my research I met many different people. And already during the shooting I realised how firm, strong, convincing and authentic the stories of my protagonists are.

As a young Turk and student Dr. Ismail Besikci already got to know the Kurds – even before I was born. This influenced his career as a scientist. He wrote many books about the Kurds. For doing this he had to spend 17 years of his life in various prisons.

Most of the former soldiers with whom I spoke understandably didn't have the courage to tell the truth about their military service in front of a camera. In the circumstances they have to fear accusations for revealing military secrets.

On the other hand the war has displaced many hundred of thousands inhabitants of Kurdish villagers to the cities. They had to leave their villages where they had lived since centuries. During the course of one generation they have been completely derooted. A major part of the Kurdish way of living has been destroyed. Orhan Miroglu has been part of the Kurdish opposition since the 70ies, even before he has been jailed in the military prison of Diyarbakir after the military coup of 1980. He had to stay in that prison for six years. The prison of Diyarbakir became a symbol of resistance for the Kurds.

Could you describe your position towards the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and its connection between the private and the political spheres.

War already begins in the minds and heads of the people – even before one catches a weapon. I always knew that the major problem of this conflict has been the Turkish politics of assimilation: the denial of the existence of the Kurdish people, their language and their culture – this very denouncement.

I was born and raised in Kurdistan. I learned the Turkish language in school not until I was six years old. I spent my whole school days in Turkish residential schools up till I came to Germany at the age of 16. These residential schools, which have been everywhere in Kurdistan, were machines for assimilation, not schools with a proper offer of knowledge. They just function to spread the kemalistic ideology of the the state, which says that everyone who lives in Turkey is a Turk.

In my film I wanted to experience what has happened to the people who have been born and raised there like me, but who have continued to live there. I wanted to understand why a girl friend of mine from my school days went to the mountains to become a guerrilla and never came back.

How would you describe the effects of the omnipresence of the Turkish state and its symbols in Turkish-Kurdistan to you and the Kurds who live there?

This land is in a "state of emergency" since 30 years. Nearly two thirds of the Turkish army is stationed in the Kurdish area. Because of the explosive population increase since the 90ies the military barracks of Diyarbakir are now situated in the middle of the city. Many military fortresses have been built in the mountains. There are military controls everywhere. The only Turks in the provincial and district towns of Kurdistan are members of the military forces, the police and the bureaucracy. The population is under a state of siege; it is an "occupied" land. Even in the metropolis of Istanbul, which I visit frequently, turkish flags are everywhere. And they get bigger and bigger everytime.

What importance does the music have for your film?

The music I remember from being a child was Kurdish. But during my time in the residential schools I was solely confronted with Turkish-nationalistic songs. Like the language Kurdish music was forbidden for a long time. It wasn't until the cautious liberalization during the 90ies that Kurdish music underwent a sort of renaissance. Nevertheless the song "Kece Kurdan" ("The Kurdish daughter"), sung by the female Kurdish singer Aynur Dogan, was forbidden in Turkey. I also used music from the Band "Kardes Türküler". They sing and perform songs from varios Turkish minorities which stand for the original cultural variety of the country.

How was the editing of the film?

For me a documentary film principally emerges at the editing table. The editing process of a documentary film is much more intensive and creative than that of a fiction feature. I was lucky to work with a very experienced editor who in addition knew much about the themes of the film. In my work the content generally determines the form. On a narrative level we initially had to find the leitmotives of the film. What is the essential? What do the protagonists tell me and the audience? How do they complement each other? It was necessary to find answers to these essentials questions. After that the editing process assumed a definite shape in which form and content determined each other.

All over the world armed forces look the same. They nearly wear the same uniforms, carry the same weapons and use nearly the same equipment. Even if the soldiers of the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrillas have totally different goals to fulfill and different means to do so, they still pass through the same military formation.

There are many tracking shots in the movie. Thus the film shows us the cities and the landscape, but even more complex circumstances are illustrated by it, too.

For me the film was a personal journey into the recent past of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. By using many tracking shots I show the cities and the landscapes I usually pass when I visit my parents. They show the variety and beauty, but also the decay of this land. And when Dr. Ismail Besikci talks about his numerous stays in prisons different cities, he sure has passed many of the streets the film passes.

While we traverse the Kurdish mountains we also pass places which have been scenes of heavy fights during the war between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrilla. This is the area where the German ex-guerrilla stayed during his time in Kurdistan. The Kurdish woman from the refugee camp Maxmur in Iraq also comes from this area. There are destroyed and abandoned villages everywhere; places, which must have been a "paradise on earth" for many before.

At one part of the film the writer Orhan Miroglu describes his place of birth, the city of Mardin. Once Assyrians, Kurds, Yezids, Arabs and Turks lived there together. One could hear three to four languages which were spoken on the streets then. But now you see a big poster above main street where you can read: "Turk, be proud, work and believe!" This is a quotation from Atatürk. You see the very same slogan beneath a monument in the centre of Ankara. Sadly they have killed the cultural diversity which existed before.

CLOSE-UP KURDISTAN

THE PROTAGONISTS

DR. ISMAIL BESIKCI

if is one of the most important scientists and intellectuals of Turkey. He has already written about Kurdish culture even when the subject was more than taboo at the beginning of his scientific career.

He was born in Corum in the central of Anatolia in 1939. During his assistant time in the Atatürk University in Erzurum at the sociological faculty in 1962 he was sent to the Kurdish area to perform his military service. There he was confronted with the Kurdish reality. Since then he has taken care of the subject "Kurds" and has written more than 30 scientific books. However, the price of it was very high and cruelly at the same time. More than 200 court procedures were initiated against him, because of the publications and statements about the Kurdish reality and the kemalistic state ideology. With short interruptions he was imprisoned a total of 17 years in various prisons in Turkey. How often he was fetched from the police and was interrogated, he does not remember any more. His publishers and defenders had to flee abroad because they were politically pursued. But he remained firmly determined and has continued his research projects about the Kurdish question during his prison-time and later at home. Today he lives in Ankara.

BERIWAN

Ex-guerilla fighter, comes from Cizre in the Kurdish part of Turkey. She has joined to the Kurdish guerrilla warfare movement at the age of 14 years. During 10 years of being a guerrilla fighter she was injured several times before she had to migrate to Europe.

ABDULKADIR AYGAN

Ex-Contra-Gurilla, comes from Urfa, also in the Kurdish part of Turkey, and is one of the best known renegades from the PKK. During the military service in Cyprus he has fled from the army and has joined the PKK. In 1985 he became a member of the Turkish security forces. Under the applications of the "remorse Law" he got free in 1990. After the dismissal he fulfilled his remaining military service and later came to the 7-headed cadre group JITEM in Diyarbakir which had been founded by the army officer Ahmet Cem Ersever. During 10 years he stayed in service for the JITEM (intelligence service and terror defence of the gendarme) which is responsible for numerous political murders of Kurdish members of the opposition. Some murders were cleared up by his confessions, but however they were not pursued by the Turkish authorities. Even until today the existence of JITEM is denied by the state. Today Aygan lives in Swedish exile with his family.

ULI CEKDAR

Ex-guerilla, one of more than 20 Germans who have joined the guerrilla warfares in the course of the Turkish-Kurdish war. To escape the military service, he went to West-Berlin in the middle of the eighties. There he got to know many Kurdish immigrants and refugees. To get an insight of the Turkish-Kurdish war and the German partial responsibility, he went to the guerrilla warfare in Kurdistan in 1993 and remained there two years. He now lives in Berlin.

ALI YILDIRIM

Ex-soldier of the Turkish army, comes from Amasya, a provincial city in the central of Anatolia. After the basic education he was sent, like most soldiers of the Turkish army, in the war zone to Turkish Kurdistan. Today he lives in Istanbul.

ORHAN MIROGLU

comes from Mardin/Midyat, in the Kurdish part of Turkey. He worked as a teacher for literature in a high school in Diyarbakir when he was arrested a year after the military putsch in 1980. He stayed a total of six years in the infamous military prison of Diyarbakir where the whole Kurdish opposition was arrested.

During an assassination by "JITEM" (intelligence service and terror defence of the gendarme) on the Kurdish author and intellectual Musa Anter he became seriously injured and was paralyzed some months. After his recovery he wrote the book "Dijwar" about the assassination and his experiences in the prison of Diyarbakir. Other books about the "Kurd's question" followed. He is a member of the board of directors of the pro-kurdish Party of the Democratic Society (DTP) and lives in Ankara.

EYSE SIPENDARIK

Refugee, comes from a village in the provincial city of Sirnak in the Kurdish part of Turkey. When the villages were bombed she left Turkey on foot over the border to the Kurdish part of Iraq. Her husband is still missing. Her two sons were with the guerrilla warfare. They have been arrested and are staying in Turkish prisons since then. One of her daughters is still with the guerrilla warfare. She herself lives with 12 000 other Kurds in the refugee camp of Maxmur in Iraq and waits to return to her home village one day.