

## Interview

### Orhan Eskiköy : On the Way to School



Photo by Rares Kövesdi

**O**rhan Eskiköy (right) is co-director (with Özgür Doğan, left) of *On the Way to School*, which is in the Joris Ivens Competition. They followed a Turkish teacher who teaches Kurdish students, who don't speak Turkish, in Demirci, a remote village near Urfa in South-Eastern Turkey.

***On the Way to School* is the story of a people with one geography and two different languages. In this perspective the film is about a break in communication. What do you think about the disconnection between East and West in Turkey?**

In Turkey, the lack of communication between people of the West and the East makes them have prejudices. Since they don't speak the same language and don't try to learn about each other, the only way they are informed about the other's culture and lifestyle is through TV. On TV Kurds are mostly presented either as terrorists or people needing pity. But, their need is to be understood by the rest of the country. Our film aims to show the audience (mainly a Turkish audience) what the Kurds' reality is.

**Could you tell us about the production process of the film?**

We started the research on the film five years ago, when Özgür and I were both students. But we couldn't find a village or a teacher. Three years ago, we applied for a workshop at the Documentary Filmmakers' Association (BSB) in Turkey. There, we met European professionals like Leena Passenen and Massimo Arvat who believed in our project so much. In 2007, we applied for the Greenhouse Documentary Development Workshop and our project was selected as the best pitch. Then we got support from different institutes like Sundance and the Jan Vrijman Fund.

**So how did you find your main character, teacher Emre?**

During research, we saw that the story of Emre is being lived by a lot of first-time teachers. When we met him, he was very pessimistic and questioning why he was there. Compared to other teachers, he looked so typically like a Turkish man from the West. He fitted our story!

**At some points, Emre seems exhausted from teaching Turkish to children who speak Kurdish. What difficulties did you encounter while following him for one year?**

Following one character for a long time is hard. Emre changed his mind so often: one day he liked the village, and then he gave up. In the beginning, he had strong self-confidence to teach Turkish. In time, when he recognized that it was not that easy, he lost hope. We were afraid of him cancelling the filming. Eventually, that didn't happen. But he was not so co-operative with us; by not answering some calls or not informing us about big changes in the village, etc.

**In the film, there are details about the education system in Turkey and a strong feeling of periphery. On the one hand we watch the strength of the system, and, on the other, the teacher had to teach Turkish before the curriculum. What do you think about the solution he found by himself?**

In developing countries like Turkey, some groups have privileges; some have no advantages at all. This makes a big gap. Rules are meaningful and can work only if all people have the same opportunities. The state has to consider and respect the diversity within the country. Of course for unity in education, the same curriculum should be followed. But, as in our film, a teacher cannot teach lessons to students who are not speaking the same language. I think it is a kind of violence against teachers and students.

**Although you were invisible in the film as directors, your view was not an 'outsider' one. How could you define your documentary-making style?**

We try to observe the life of real characters in their real stories and real locations. This is the formula of our style. In observational documentary, you have to be with your characters at the right moment. If you manage to capture the feelings and true life, it is enjoyable. Otherwise, this style makes the filmmaker nervous.

Esra Demirkıran