

**ANATOLIAN RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PLATFORM/
VANGUARDS OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE / Part 2**

"Enstantane Documentary and the Syriac Diaspora" with Hakan Aytekin

TOPICS: Initiation of the documentary, production stages, importance of oral history studies.

In the second part of our interview series for ADİP, we will talk to documentary film director Hakan Aytekin about his film "Snapshot" (Enstantane). Our interview also includes details about the discipline of oral history.

Nükhet Everi- Hakan Aytekin, at the beginning I would like to talk about you. Who is Hakan Aytekin? And why did you make this film? Let's listen to you.

Hakan Aytekin- I was born in Ankara in 1961. I was educated in the field of communication and I also teach this subject . Although I am interested in almost every area of cinema, my main speciality is documentary cinema. I have been in the world of documentary cinema since 1978. I have taken part in many documentaries, especially on Anatolian cultures and cultural history. For the last 20 years or so, I have focused on Syriac culture.

This was not a coincidence. It was the result of efforts and experience I had been accumulating for many years. In 1992, I learned about Syrians for the first time through a letter of request sent to TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation - Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu). A Syriac, İsa Bakır, who used to live in the village of Harabe Mişke in Mardin, sought refuge in the Netherlands. He wrote a letter to Türkiye. He wanted them to play the folk song "The Wind of Longing" (Hasret Rüzgârı) for people like him who were scattered in different parts of the world.

Such a letter encouraged me to meet and get to know Syrians. In 2001, I made my first film on Syrians with the film "The Light Seeks Its Voice" (Işık Sesesini Arıyor). Afterwards, there were a series of correspondences, articles, and stories written in different media on the subject of İsa Bakır and his letter, which led me on this path. I wrote a trilingual (Turkish, English, and Syriac) book called "The Wind of Longing (Hasret Rüzgârı) which brought all of these together

. After publishing the book, I wanted to make a film about the Syriac language based on the coincidence that UNESCO declared 2007 as the "World Year of Disappearing Languages". I directed the documentary "A Letter for Tomorrow" (Yarına Bir Harf). The second film was about writing, one of the most important carrier elements of a culture. I always wanted to make a diaspora film. It came out of the blue one night. A photo frame, a snapshot I came across on Facebook became the source of the film "Snapshot".

This photo was taken in the city of Idil in south-east Türkiye in the late 1980s. It was a photograph of 18 Syrians, children, young men and women. And there was something written underneath, full of emotion. I immediately wrote to Ferit Sağ and said, "If you help me, I'll start a film." I said, "I'm going to make a film of your photo and if you're with me, I'll do it." He was very excited and we searched for those 18 people. I set out to see if I could make a film that could tell the story of migration and express hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of memories.

Nükhet Everi- So how did this adventure progress step by step? Can you briefly tell us about it?

Hakan Aytekin- There is only one photograph. There is no information about who took the photo, where it was taken, when it was taken, or how it was taken. At the first stage, we immediately tried to identify those 18 people. Where are they today? What is their situation?

How old are they? When did they emigrate? How is their emigration story more or less established? What is their marital status today? Because in the photo they are children. These people emigrated gradually. A mass emigration, not an instant rupture. It was an emigration that spread over years. The emigration of those 18 people took place during about 20 years. The earliest one to leave was in 1983 and the last one left in 2003.

I did not put the photograph in front of them as a reminder. I talked to them without showing them the photograph, I didn't want to influence them. Where was it taken? Why was it taken that day? For example, one of the most critical questions was "Who was in the photograph?" So, I first tried to remove the residues left in their minds. Then I put the photograph in front of them. When they picked up the photograph and held it in their hands, what they remembered until that moment, sometimes coincided with and sometimes contradicted what the photograph reminded them of. So there is a reality, there is what we remember, what we think we remember. Or there are those we want to remember that way because memory actually reconstructs the past. And while it is doing this, it necessarily reconstructs the past according to the requirements of the present. This is also an area I have been working on academically. My advantage was that they sometimes gave similar and sometimes very contradictory answers to the questions I asked, and this ensured the fluidity of the film. Therefore, I think that thanks to the feeling of remembering, forgetting, and being surprised, the film draws that human framework together with the questions.

As soon as the film was over, producer Özcan Geçer and I immediately took it on board. He is my dear companion, my production friend. First, we held screenings in the cities where the protagonists of the film are located. We did six screenings, three in Germany and three in Switzerland, and most of these screenings were held in film theaters. We did the finale of that first tour in Switzerland in one of the theaters where the Locarno Film Festival was held. After a short while we went to Sweden, because there are many Syrians living in Sweden. I can get all kinds of support from them because there is a certain intellectual circle in there. When it comes to translation, relationships, and screenings in Sweden, there is an Syrian community that welcomes us.