A short documentary about a long story

NEYSE HALİM ÇIKSIN FALİM

COFFEE FUTURES

Short Documentary
Duration: 22 min. Production: 2009, Turkey
Language: Turkish & English Subtitles: English & Turkish
Format: Hdv – Colour – 16:9 - Stereo

contact:
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COFFEE FUTURES

Producer
Umut Gürsel,
Zeynep Devrim Gürsel

Director
Zeynep Devrim Gürsel

Director of Photography
Editor & Graphic Design
Ebru Karaca

Mixing Engineer
Can Aykal

European Union Consultant
Cengiz Aktar

Still Photographer
Tolga Sezgin

Additional Camera
Aydın Kapancık

Archival Footage
Birand Yapım, CNN Türk

Additional Graphic Design
Zeynep Günel

Web
Gokhan Duyar

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Coffee Futures weaves together the Turkish custom of coffee fortune-telling with Turkey’s decades-long attempt to join the European Union, revealing the textures of a society whose fate has long been nationally and internationally debated. It investigates the collective psychology of anticipating an uncertain national future.

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Zeynep Devrim Gürsel (Co-Producer, Director)

Zeynep Devrim Gürsel is an anthropologist who teaches at the University of Michigan. Originally trained in literature, she received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. She researches how things become imagineable both for individuals and groups, and how forms in which the past and today are narrated are shaped by and shape expectations of the future. She was introduced to the documentary world when she worked on Damming the Euphrates (Paxton Winters, 2001) in Southeast Turkey.

Ebru Karaca (Director of Photography, Editor, Graphic Design)

Ebru Karaca was born in Hanau/Germany. Since completing her M.A. in Media Design at The University of Applied Sciences (Mainz/Germany) in 2004, she has been living in Istanbul/Turkey, where she continues her work as a filmmaker of shorts and documentaries. She is also an assistant director and post-production manager for TV commercials and has worked as a line producer for international TV channels. Her work as a freelance editor includes video art, documentaries, reports and news segments for television.
Coffee Futures weaves individual fortunes with the story of Turkey’s decades long attempts to become a member of the European Union. Promises and predictions made by politicians, both foreign and domestic, are juxtaposed with the rhetorics and practices of everyday coffee fortune telling.

The widespread custom of coffee fortune telling in Turkey is an everyday communication tool. Coffee fortunes are both a way of dealing with hopes, fears and worries, and also a way of indirectly voicing matters usually left unspoken. Like any language, this narrative form has its protocols, rules and tropes, and yet simultaneously each telling bears distinct marks of the teller’s personal style and the individual fortune seeker’s condition.

So I set out to seek my fortune and flipped my cup for two dozen people, both friends and strangers. These amateur fortunetellers all read my individual fortune as they might any other day, except that at the very end I also asked for their opinion on the future of Turkey and Europe.

July 31, 2009 marked the 50th year anniversary of Turkey’s application to apply to the ever elusive European Union (maiden name European Economic Community). On this long and seemingly endless path, the film echoes descriptions of a constantly invoked but not yet attained future. Coffee Futures attempts to render the emotional texture of a society whose fate has been nationally and internationally debated often in relation to Europeanness over a very long period of time, to hint at the psychology of collective waiting and anticipating a national future.
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

When I was living in Paris in 2004, researching the world of photojournalism, everyone I met wanted to talk about Turkey’s application to join the European Union. Yet people had such entrenched opinions on the topic that I found it hard to be heard; those in favor of Turkey’s entering the EU and those opposed both seemed to be asking me only to confirm their pre-existing ideas on the matter. I longed for debates in which genuine dialogue was possible; instead I often felt scripted into the role of a national spokesperson. The idea for Coffee Futures arose from this tension and from the desire to express what it felt like to be confronted with the same issues day after day.

When I moved back to Istanbul in 2007, I was surprised by how the rhetoric of EU membership had seeped into everyday life. Everyone had an opinion on the issue. Whether the conversation was about human rights, traffic, arts, or education, every conversation seemed to return to the question of the European Union. When I listened to politicians on the topic, whether foreign or domestic, I was struck by their formulaic phrases. The rhetoric of Turkey’s future relationship with the EU reminded me of the rhetoric of coffee fortune-telling, a widespread custom that had captivated me for years; it is an intriguing form of everyday communication. So I decided to make a film about the rhetorics of prognostication – the ways in which the future is talked about -- and asked a wide variety of people to participate. The multiplicity of faces and cups was intended to remind us that just as there are many Europes in Europe, there are many Turkeys in Turkey.

Coffee fortunes are a creative way to address matters that are usually left unspoken. I hoped that coming at “the EU question” from this lighter angle might open up the possibility for fresh dialogue, one that went beyond the well-rehearsed lines that everyone knows by heart. About this time, I met the talented Ebru Karaca, who agreed to be the director of photography and editor. After many cups of coffee, we shot the film in the summer of 2008.

July 31, 2009 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Turkey’s application to apply to the ever-elusive European Union (néé European Economic Community); Coffee Futures, a film that seeks to capture some of the emotional residue of this long-promised partnership, had its gala the night before this bittersweet milestone. Regardless of whether Turkey eventually joins the EU or not, during this half century the promise of Europe has shaped Turkey, just as the debates about including or excluding Turkey have shaped the contours of contemporary Europe.

This is a short documentary about a long story. How does the future shape the present? Do the ways in which the future is described somehow shape that future? How does it feel for one’s future be a regular topic of speculation? I made the film in the hope of encouraging a dialogue born from openness rather than from suspicion, an opportunity to ask ourselves “What kind of a place do we want Europe to be in the future?”

Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, 2009
What do people say about Coffee Futures?

“Perhaps one way to cope with the never-ending European torture is to start enjoying it. Zeynep Gürsel’s film is a big step in that direction. I never thought the EU process could be so funny!”

Haluk Şahin
Director, Department of Television News and Programming, İstanbul Bilgi University, Columnist, Radikal newspaper

“Coffee Futures is a very charming and effective documentary. Through the story of fortune-tellers, Coffee Futures brings to light some of the misunderstandings between Western Europe, the European Union, and Turkey, but also misunderstandings about Europe and about Turkey. According to the fortune-tellers, the future of this longstanding relationship is in our hands. Who will make the first move?”

Thierry Warin
Associate Professor of Economics, Director of the International Studies Program, Middlebury College.

“Coffee Futures is a delightful, engaging and brilliant short film about Turkey’s ambivalent relationship with the European Union. Along the way, filmmaker and anthropologist Zeynep Gürsel introduces us to everyday Turkish culture and society. Gürsel deftly weaves together parallel narratives about personal fortunes in love and marriage and the future of Turkish-EU relations. This film is sure to both amuse and enlighten students about the problematic ‘courtship’ between Turkey and the EU.”

Melani Cammett
Associate Professor of Political Science, Brown University

“What does coffee have to do with the future? What does Turkey have to do with Europe? The answer in both cases is ‘everything’ in this witty, gorgeous film about romance and politics found at the bottom of a coffee cup.”

Linda Williams
Professor of Film Studies, University of California, Berkeley

“With wonderful subtlety and grace Zeynep Gürsel employs the traditional narrative of coffee-grounds reading to talk about the future of Turkey vis-a-vis the European Union. What is even more central to Coffee Futures is the bricolage of types, a broad canvas of Turkish citizens all united by the same custom, telling the future through their particular emotional and social approach. This is a timely, provocative and artful project.”

Karen Barkey
Professor of Sociology, Columbia University

“This film begins with an everyday practice—beautifully filmed—of fortune-telling with coffee, likely to be unfamiliar to many US students. Through elegant juxtapositions, linkages are made between the aspirations for attention, affection and respect of ordinary citizens and of nation-states. Suddenly both the EU and Turkey are exposed as very human “actors” in dialogue and relationship, with histories, desires, and suffering. The film provides a rich entry point for student exploration of the “global” as well as of “culture.”

Abigail Stewart
Professor of Psychology and Women’s Studies

“The best of ethnographic movies teach us about more than the subject matter at hand. Coffee Futures tells us not only about the precarious courtship between Turkey and the EU, revealing how urban Turks across age, class, and ethnicity think of the nation-state and its relationship to Europe, but also offers a vertical slice of everyday life in Istanbul. The fleeting encounters between fortune-tellers and those seeking their prophecy show us how women and men forge intimacy, make judgments, find meaning in the ineffable, and critically humor the inevitable. This film will be enjoyed and appreciated by anthropologists and lay audiences alike.”

Saida Hodzic
Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies, George Mason University

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AWARDS

EurActiv Award for Debating Europe Nationally, Special Jury Award for “Originality,” Brussels, Nov 12 2009

Best Documentary Short, MiradasDoc Festival

Audience Award, If Istanbul International Independent Film Festival

Audience Award, Ann Arbor Film Festival

Neighboring Nations Award, Cairo Documentary Film Festival
FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

November 2009
London Turkish Film Festival

February 2010
If Istanbul International Independent Film Festival

March 2010
Durango Independent Film Festival
Ankara International Film Festival
(International Documentary Competition)
Filmmor Women’s Film Festival
(Travelling Festival, Turkey)
Ann Arbor Film Festival

April 2010
San Francisco International Film Festival
(Documentary Short Film Competition)

June 2010
Documentarist, Istanbul

July 2010
Free Range Film Festival, Wrenshall, MN

September 2010
International Film Festival Ireland
Elles Tournent: Women’s Film Festival of Brussels

October 2010
MEDIMED’10, Sitges, Spain
SF Doc Fest, San Francisco
MiradasDoc Festival, Guía de Isora, Tenerife
Istanbul 1001 Documentaries Film Festival

November 2010
VERZIO International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, Budapest, Hungary
Michigan Film Festival, Grand Rapids, MI

March 2011
Cairo Documentary Film Festival, Egypt

May 2011
Alanya International Documentary Festival, Alanya, Turkey

June 2011
Addis International Film Festival, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

July 2011
A Film For Peace Festival, Medea, Italy and London, UK

September 2011
Days of Ethnographic Film, Moscow, Russia
SPECIAL SCREENINGS AT POLITICAL, CULTURAL and ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

July 30, 2009
Gala: Pera Museum, Istanbul
50th Anniversary of Turkey’s Application to the EU

La Turquie et L’Europe: Une evolution en interaction,
Université de Strasbourg, France

September 2009

Bosphorus University, Istanbul, Turkey

Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Providence, RI

October 2009
School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Georgetown University, Doha, Qatar

Department of Economics, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

November 2009

Week of Taste, Belgian Annual Food Festival,
Theme: Turkish cuisine, Gent, Belgium

Middle East Studies Association meetings, Boston, MA

Turkish Studies Colloquium, University of Michigan

December 2009

American Anthropological Association meetings, Philadelphia, PA

Screening at the European Parliament on a panel about
Women and the EU, in celebration of the 75th year of
Turkish women receiving the right to vote and to hold
office, Brussels, Belgium

Australian Anthropology Society meetings, Sydney

January 2010

Middle East Institute and Columbia Scheps Seminar Series in
Anthropology, Columbia University

Kevorkian Center for Near East Studies and Center for
Religion and Media, New York University

Center for European Studies, University of Florida

February 2010

Council on Middle East Studies, Yale University,
Georgetown University, Washington DC

Middle East Film Festival, University of Pennsylvania,
Center for Contemporary European Studies, University of Buffalo, NY

March 2010

The New Islamic Public Sphere Programme, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

April 2010

Anthropology of Europe Workshop, University of Chicago

Institute for European Studies, University of Michigan

May 2010

Social Anthropology Society, Cambridge University

Departments of Media Arts and Politics & International Relations, Royal Halloway, University of London

What Turkey? What Europe?, Salzburg Global Seminar, Austria

August 2010

Visible Evidence - Documentary Conference, Istanbul, Turkey

Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, Bielefeld, Germany

February 2011

American and International Studies Colloquium, Ramapo College, NJ
April 2011

Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University
Mediterranean Studies Forum, Stanford University, CA
EuroAtlantic Center, Bratislava, Slovakia

September 2011

Featured in Art/E/Fact online journal of art and anthropology,
Centre for Visual Anthropology at Goldsmiths University of London