



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2023  
Official Selection

# YURT (DORMITORY) by Nehir Tuna



TN YAPIM, RED BALLOON FILM & CINE-SUD PROMOTION  
PRESENT



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Runtime : 118 mn  
2023 – Turkey, Germany, France – 3:2 – 5.1

▷ *INTERNATIONAL PRESS*

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1997, the tensions between religious and secular Turks are increasing. Fourteen-year-old Ahmet is sent by his recently converted father to an Islamic dormitory, a "Yurt", to learn Muslim values. Ahmet works hard to be the perfect son but he has trouble fitting in with rough kids at the Yurt, and feels isolated in his day secular school, where he hides his new home from his classmates. His only solace is a new friend Hakan, a street-smart kid who knows how to work the Yurt system. Together they dream of making their own decisions.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"As a child, I was sent to a religious dormitory for 5 years. I have this memory that I never forget: I'm in the dormitory's library. My head is leaned against the window. There is the warmth of the radiator in my legs, and the coldness of the window on my forehead. My eyes are locked on the living room of our house that is 300 meters away, waiting for the lights to turn on. Waiting for my parents to come home. Then the lights go on and I watch them. Dad takes off his jacket and hangs it on the back of a chair, mom takes off her earrings.. They watch tv, have dinner... I watch them live. I watch the most usual, boring things with longing. Mostly with a lump in my throat.

In *Dormitory*, I tried to bring my own personal experience to tell a story that transcends the macro political struggle between religiosity and secularism, conveying the isolation and pressure Ahmet faces as he struggles to meet his family's expectations and also to belong somewhere." **Nehir Tuna**



# DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

## **Yurt is your first feature film. To what extent is it autobiographical?**

Obviously, there are many connections between the story that is told in the film and mine. Just like Ahmet, the main character, I've spent five years in a religious boarding school. I keep abiding memories of this experience, and most of them are quite similar to what Ahmet is going through: being brutally separated from one's family, having to get used to new living conditions overnight... The reasons why my father wanted to send me to a boarding school are also addressed in the film: to climb the social ladder, to assert his faith and his religious responsibilities, to set himself up as an example within the community... Ahmet's father is seeking his own salvation by sending his son away.

Just like I was, Ahmet is a hard-working student, who doesn't rebel much and who wants to please everyone, especially his father. He is also really resilient: he knows that time will prove him right.

## **Did you face particular challenges whilst producing or shooting *Yurt*?**

Somehow, the whole process was a challenge! We were denied state aid several times. Without it, there was no way we could get a European funding. So we had to make do, to call on friends, to raise money in France and in Germany..

While I was making the short film *The Shoes*, a prequel to *Yurt*, we had found the perfect location for the boarding school scenes, we were denied the authorization to shoot. It's an anecdote worth telling.

The scenario leaked, and the managers of the place found out that at some point shoes were stolen. They thought that nobody in a religious boarding school could be so impure as to commit such a crime! Yet, *Yurt* isn't meant as a direct criticism of religion in Turkey. I have always known it would be a tricky project. Those schools are closed to the outside world, boarders are supposed to be pure individuals, but the pressure they are under makes them all the more prone to malicious acts.

## ***Yurt* starts in black and white and then, mid-course, it switches to colour. What was the motive for this bold move?**

Symbolically, I thought that black and white suited life at the boarding school: everything in there is unequivocal, it is either all black or all white. You are either a devout person or an infidel, there is no room for nuance. There is no room for colour either, especially for the mixing of colours. Colours only appear when Ahmet and Hakan run away and experience a true feeling of freedom. The film becomes more dynamic, the camera is more mobile, and freer as well... Then the colours slightly fade out as the film draws to an end.

## **The film takes place in 1996, which was not that long ago, yet everything seems to have changed...**

Admittedly, twenty-five years ago, the opposition between the religious and the secular was much clearer, and sometimes the state put violent pressure on religious power... Today, it's different: the

religious has won, pressures are unnecessary, but it also means that these schools still exist and that indoctrination is stronger than ever. For my story, I needed this distance in time, I needed this fight, this back and forth between a secular school and a religious boarding school. But as for the rest, nothing has changed, and it seemed necessary to me that *Yurt* showed that: Ahmet is still there, among us.

### **How would you describe the relationship between Ahmet and Hakan? Is it a love story?**

All relationships are multifaceted, and sometimes it just takes a different outlook to change the nature of a bond. Overall, I think that *Yurt* is the story of a young boy who is searching for love: the love of his father, or the -more classically romantic- love of the young girl who joins his class during the year, or that, more friendly, between him and Hakan, whom he sees at once as a model, a big brother... To me, Ahmet's story is a combination of those three relationships. And maybe he gradually realises that his relationship with Hakan features all these aspects: filial love, romantic love, friendship/love.

### **What do you think will happen to Ahmet after the end of the film?**

At the end of the film, Ahmet takes over, he becomes Hakan in a way. The last scene repeats the music used earlier when the two boys are on the roof and they talk about their dreams and their lust for freedom. We can see how Ahmet is copying Hakan's gestures, playing with the light, picking up a cigarette butt... Ahmet will certainly keep on living in this boarding school, but he obviously has grown

up, he is more aware of his situation. From then on, as was the case with Hakan, Ahmet becomes immune to indoctrination and ideology: it goes in one ear and out the other. In other words: "*You may take my body, but you won't have my soul*". Ahmet is capable of escaping that place: he is now a free man.



## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

NEHIR TUNA's work combines social commentary and an original visual aesthetic, tackling stories on Turkey's complex present-day issues, be it masculinity or conservatism. A Sundance Alumni, Tuna was selected to take part in 2019 Sundance Screenwriters Lab and 2020 Directors and Screenwriters Lab. He participated in the 2018 Nipkow film residency program. He has written and directed seven short films, including *THE SHOES*, a prequel to *YURT (DORMITORY)*. Tuna studied at Columbia University's Graduate Film Program and holds an MFA in directing from Rochester Institute of Technology.

## FILMOGRAPHY

2018	<b>AYAKKABI</b> ( <i>The Shoes</i> )	14 min
2015	<b>BASUR</b> ( <i>Hemorrhoid</i> )	22 min
2017	<b>FRIENDS</b>	8 min
2012	<b>DEDELER EN IYISINI BILIR</b> ( <i>Grandpas Know Best</i> )	20 min
2010	<b>MARY'S BATHROOM CAMP</b>	10 min
2010	<b>18</b>	10 min
2007	<b>BAKIRE ADA</b> ( <i>Virgin Island</i> )	9 min



## **CAST**

<b>Dođa Karakaş</b>	Ahmet
<b>Can Bartu Arslan</b>	Hakan
<b>Ozan Çelik</b>	Yakup Hodja
<b>Tansu Biçer</b>	Father
<b>Didem Ellialtı</b>	Mother
<b>Orhan Güner</b>	Behlül Hodja
<b>Işilti Su Alyanak</b>	Sevinç



## CREW

Director	<b>Nehir Tuna</b>
Screenplay	<b>Nehir Tuna</b>
Cinematography	<b>Florent Herry, SBC</b>
Editing	<b>Ayris Alptekin</b>
Music	<b>Avi Medina</b>
Sound	<b>Simone Weber</b>
Production design	<b>Vahhap Ayhan</b>
Costume design	<b>Didem Ellialtı</b>
VFX	<b>Philippe Perrot</b>
Producers	<b>Tanay Abbasođlu, Dorothe Beinemeier, Thierry Lenouvel</b>
Co-producers	<b>Nehir Tuna, Didem Ellialtı, Cenk Tuncel, Selin Erdem, Tolga T. Talay, Ozan Bilen, Gökalp Köseođlu, Bahadır Özçetin, Ragıp Ergün</b>
Associate Producers	<b>Asiye Deđirmenci, Mustafa Uzuner, Beste Yamalıođlu</b>
Production	<b>TN Yapım, Red Balloon Film</b>
Co-production	<b>Cine-Sud Promotion</b>
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