

# H Y S T E R I A

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY

MEHMET AKIF BÜYÜKATALAY



# PRESS NOTES

# HYSTERIA

COUNTRY	Germany
YEAR	2025
LENGTH	104 min.
GENRE	Political Thriller
LANGUAGES	German, Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, English
WRITER & DIRECTOR	Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay
CAST	Devrim Lingnau, Mehdi Meskar, Serkan Kaya, Nicolette Krebitz, Aziz Çapkurt, Nazmi Kırık
PRODUCERS	Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay, Claus Herzog-Reichel
PRODUCTION COMPANY	filmfaust
WORLD SALES	Pluto Film



## WORLD PREMIERE

Berlinale 2025 (Panorama)



## FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

15.02.2025 – 18:30h – Zoo Palast 1 (World Premiere)  
16.02.2025 – 15:30h – Urania  
17.02.2025 – 22:00h – Cubix 7  
18.02.2025 – 14:00h – Odeon  
18.02.2025 – 21:45h – Filmtheater am Friedrichshain  
21.02.2025 – 21:30h – Zoo Palast 1

## MARKET SCREENINGS

Saturday, 15 February – 10:40h – CinemaxX 3  
Tuesday, 18 February – 11:10h – CinemaxX 5  
Tuesday, 18 February – 16:00h – Virtual Cinema 7 (Online)

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## **TAGLINE**

Behind every flame lies a darker truth.

## **SYNOPSIS**

When a burned Quran is found on a film set, the shoot takes a dark turn and the crew is thrown into turmoil. Caught in the crossfire of accusations, 24-year-old intern Elif is drawn into a dangerous game of secrets and lies, finding herself at the heart of an all-absorbing conspiracy.



## MEHMET AKIF BÜYÜKATALAY

Director & Producer

Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay (born 1987) is a filmmaker and producer who graduated from the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. His directorial debut "Oray," garnered international acclaim and won the prestigious Best First Feature Award at the 2019 Berlinale.

In 2020, he co-founded filmfaust GmbH with producer Claus Herzog-Reichel. The company has since established itself as a creative force in European cinema, producing award-winning features and documentaries. Notable productions include Cem Kaya's "Love, Deutschmarks and Death" and "Sirens Call" by directing duo Miri Ian Gossing and Lina Sieckmann.

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2013 Vor dem Tor des Ijtihad (short flm, as director)
- 2019 Oray (1st Feature Film, as director)
- 2022 Love, Deutschmarks and Death (as writer & creative producer)
- 2024 Immaculata (as producer)
- 2025 Sirens Call (as producer)
- 2025 Hysteria (2nd Feature Film, as director and producer)



## CLAUS HERZOG-REICHEL

Producer

Claus Herzog-Reichel (born 1986) is a film producer based in Cologne, Germany. His first production, "Oray," by Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay won the First Feature Award at the 2019 Berlinale. The following year, he and Büyükcatalay started their own production company, filmfaust GmbH. Their jointly produced documentary "Love, Deutschmarks and Death," directed by Cem Kaya, earned both a German Film Award nomination in 2023 and a Grimme Award in 2024.

In 2024, he produced "Immaculata," a short film by Kim Lêa Sakkal that was selected for the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. His newest films, "Hysteria" and "Sirens Call," will premiere at the 2025 Berlinale.

Herzog-Reichel is currently working on four new feature films: "A Paradise Lost" by Kim Lêa Sakkal, "Eigengrau" by Ruhat Yildiz, "Summer Blues" by Anna Anson, and "Future is in Pamphylia" by Deren Ercenk. He trained at the Rotterdam Producer Labs and Berlinale Talents, and is a member of the German Film Academy.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2019 Oray (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)
- 2022 Love, Deutschmarks and Death (dir. Cem Kaya)
- 2024 Immaculata (dir. Kim Lêa Sakkal)
- 2025 Sirens Call (dir. Miri Ian Gossing & Lina Sieckmann)
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)



## DEVIRIM LINGNAU AS ELIF

Devrim Lingnau began her career with a standout performance in the British film "Carmilla," which quickly positioned her as a rising talent. She continued to build her career with roles in the German TV series "Allmen" and the film "Auerhaus," further showcasing her versatility and depth as an actress.

In 2023, Lingnau's remarkable portrayal of Empress Elisabeth in the Emmy-winning Netflix series "The Empress" earned her the prestigious German Acting Award for Best Emerging Actress, solidifying her place among the most exciting talents in the industry.

Her latest project, "Lady Nazca," is a German-French co-production directed by Damien Dorsaz, where she plays Maria Reiche, a pioneering figure who studied the Nazca Lines in Peru during the 1950s. In 2025, the highly anticipated film "Hysteria" will be released, with Lingnau starring in the lead role.

On the occasion of Berlinale 2025, she was selected as a **European Shooting Star** and recognized as one of the best upcoming European acting talents worldwide.

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2019 Carmilla (dir. Emily Harris)
- 2019 Auerhaus (dir. Neele Leana Vollmar)
- 2021 Borga (dir. York-Fabian Raabe)
- 2022 The Empress (dir. Katrin Gebbe, Florian Cossen)
- 2024 Lady Nazca (dir. Damien Dorsaz)
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)



## MEHDI MESKAR AS SAID

Mehdi Meskar was born into a Moroccan family in Calabria in 1995 and moved to Paris at the age of 15. After several short films and theatre appearances in France, he made his cinema debut in François Ozon's film "In the House." In 2017, he played his first leading role in the critically acclaimed French web series "Les Engagés," for which he received multiple Best Actor nominations in the drama series category.

He then took the title role in "Rafaël" by Oscar-nominated director Ben Sombogaart. For his performance in Randa Chahoud's feature film debut "The Accidental Rebel," alongside Emily Cox and Jonas Nay, Meskar won Best Actor at the Max Ophüls Preis film festival, gaining recognition in Germany. He went on to appear in Dror Zahavi's "Crescendo" and took various roles in series and films across Germany, Italy, France, and Canada.

In 2022, Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay cast him in his second feature film "Hysteria," which will celebrate its world premiere at the Berlinale 2025. Currently, Meskar stars in the highly successful French black comedy "How to Make a Killing" by Franck Dubosc.

### FILMOGRAPHY

2012	In the House (dir. François Ozon)
2015	Pizza and Dates (dir. Fariborz Kamkari)
2016	Orpheline (dir. Arnaud des Pallières)
2017	Rafaël (dir. Ben Sombogaart)
2018	The Accidental Rebel (dir. Randa Chahoud)
2019	Crescendo (dir. Dror Zahavi)
2022	Prophets (dir. Alessio Cremonini)
2025	Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)



## SERKAN KAYA AS YIGIT

Serkan Kaya, born in 1977 in Leverkusen, is fluent in German, English, and Turkish. He studied acting and musical theatre at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen and went on to take on leading roles in musical theatre. From 2011 to 2016, he portrayed Udo Lindenberg in "Hinterm Horizont" in Berlin. Kaya has also performed in theatre productions at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus, Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen, and Theater Bonn, collaborating with directors such as Armin Petras and Andreas Kriegenburg.

His recent work includes starring in the film "Was von der Liebe bleibt" (2023), the ZDF thriller "Eine bessere Welt" (2024), the ARTE/ZDF production "Von uns wird es keiner sein" (2024), and "Hysteria" (2025). He received the German Acting Award in 2021 for his leading role in the streaming series "KBV" and the Grimme Audience Award in 2020 for his performance in "Der König von Köln."

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2020 Der König von Köln
- 2021 KBV (TV Series)
- 2023 Was von der Liebe bleibt
- 2024 Eine bessere Welt
- 2024 Von uns wird es keiner sein
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)





## NICOLETTE KREBITZ AS LILITH

Nicolette Krebitz was born and raised in West Berlin. She studied classical dance at the Berliner Ballett Centrum and completed her acting training with a diploma in 1992 at the Fritz Kirchhoff Acting School. Since 1982, she has been active as an actress in both film and television productions. In 1999, she directed her first feature film, "Jeans," and has since alternated between acting and directing. For the film "Bandits" (1997), Krebitz and her co-stars composed and recorded the soundtrack, which topped the German album charts for over eight weeks and earned a Gold Record and the Bavarian Film Award for Best Film Music. Since 1996, she has been a member of the Berlin-based electronic music group Terranova.

Her acting career includes notable roles in films such as "Bandits" (1997, dir. Katja von Garnier), "Der Tunnel" (2001, dir. Roland Suso Richter), "Unter dir die Stadt" (2010, dir. Christoph Hochhäusler), and "Das Licht" (2023, dir. Tom Tykwer).

Nicolette Krebitz continues to be a multifaceted presence in the German film industry, both behind and in front of the camera.

### FILMOGRAPHY AS ACTOR (SELECTION)

- 1997 Bandits (dir. Katja von Garnier)
- 2001 Der Tunnel (dir. Roland Suso Richter)
- 2010 Unter dir die Stadt (dir. Christoph Hochhäusler)
- 2025 Das Licht (dir. Tom Tykwer)
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)

### FILMOGRAPHY AS DIRECTOR

- 1999 Jeans
- 2016 Wild (Sundance Film Festival)
- 2022 A E I O U (Berlinale Competition)



## AZİZ ÇAPKURT AS MUSTAFA

Aziz Çapkurt is a Munich-based Kurdish actor. He has worked on numerous acclaimed international projects. His credits include the Apple TV+ sci-fi series "Invasion," directed by Emmy-winning director Jamie Payne and produced by Simon Kinberg ("The Martian"), and "Catherine the Great" (HBO) alongside Helen Mirren. He also starred in the Disney+ series "Escape."

Recently, he appeared in the Hollywood feature "Dirty Angels," starring Eva Green and directed by Martin Campbell ("Casino Royale"). Çapkurt has also performed in numerous German films, including Ayşe Polat's Lola Award-winning "Im toten Winkel," Matthias Glasner's "Informant," and Ilker Catak's "Yellow Letters."

He appears in "Brides" by Nadia Fall, which had its world premiere in the main competition at Sundance Film Festival 2025. Çapkurt is currently working on Maria Sodahl's new project "Isle."

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2019 Catherine the Great (dir. Philip Martin) - HBO Series
- 2022 Invasion (dir. Jamie Payne) - Apple TV+ Series
- 2022 Im toten Winkel (dir. Ayşe Polat)
- 2023 Escape (dir. Steve Barron) - Disney+ Series
- 2023 Informant (dir. Matthias Glasner)
- 2024 Dirty Angels (dir. Martin Campbell)
- 2024 Yellow Letters (dir. Ilker Catak)
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükatay)



## NAZMI KIRIK AS MAJID

Nazmi Kırık, born in 1976 in Diyarbakır, began his artistic career at the Mesopotamian Cultural Association, where he worked in theatre and dance from 1993. Despite difficult political circumstances and repeated imprisonment, he continued his work after his release. In 1996, he moved to Istanbul and worked in the theatre group Jiyana Nu of the Mesopotamian Cultural Centre.

Kırık made his film debut in 1999 in "Journey to the Sun" by Yeşim Ustaoğlu, a film that was awarded the Blue Angel and the Peace Film Prize at the Berlinale. His other filmography includes internationally recognized productions such as "Kilomètre Zéro," for which he was nominated for Best Male Actor at Cannes, "Your Beauty Is Worth Nothing," and "Rabiye Kurnaz vs. George W. Bush." He also appeared in the Netflix series "Bir Başkadır" ("Eight People in Istanbul").

Nazmi Kırık has lived in Hamburg since 2002 and regularly appears in German productions. His current projects include the ARD mini-series "The Next Level," the TV film "Der gute Bulle - Heaven Can Wait," and the ZDF film "Nachtschicht - Nichts kann uns trennen." He also appeared in the feature film "Elaha" (dir. Milena Aboyan).

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 1999 Journey to the Sun (dir. Yeşim Ustaoğlu)
- 2005 Kilomètre Zéro (dir. Hiner Saleem)
- 2012 Your Beauty Is Worth Nothing (dir. Hüseyin Tabak)
- 2022 Rabiye Kurnaz vs. George W. Bush (dir. Andreas Dresen)
- 2020 Bir Başkadır (Eight People in Istanbul) (dir. Berkun Oya) - Netflix Series
- 2023 Der gute Bulle - Heaven Can Wait (dir. Lars Becker) - TV Film
- 2023 Elaha (dir. Milena Aboyan)
- 2025 Hysteria (dir. Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay)



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MEHMET AKIF BÜYÜKATALAY

### ***What drew you to this story, and what themes were you most interested in exploring?***

Imagine losing your key and receiving a call from someone claiming he has found your keys. Overjoyed, you share your address, eagerly waiting for the stranger to return them... but he never shows up. Now, out there, someone holds your key, knows where you live, and could enter your home at any moment. Exactly this feeling, this vulnerability was the initial spark for *Hysteria*.

### ***So, it's about the stranger?***

Yes. It's about how the idea of the Stranger or the Other can cloud our perception and hinder our interactions as images hold more power than the imaged individuals. I remember my school days when I was the only foreigner in my class, and there was an initiative where we received weekly magazines. Full of excitement, I went home, read it, and came across an article about young, criminal Turkish migrants. It was in a phase like now, where criminal migrants were the dominant topic. The way the article portrayed the young "Mehmet"s couldn't have been further from my own reality, of the reality of my family, of my hood. With every line, my sense of powerlessness, my agitation, and my nervousness grew. I knew everyone in the class was reading that magazine, and I knew that the image of the „Mehmet“ would be far larger than the real Mehmet in the class.

### ***So it's also personal story?***

Absolutely. *Hysteria* is the continuation of my discussion about media representation, especially in politically and emotionally charged spaces of discourse, like we all are experiencing at the moment. While with my debut film "Oray," I tried to assert my right to my own, subjective perspective on Muslim life in Germany outside of the usual world of images, "Hysteria" is more about the responsibility and challenges in producing the images of the „others“ under existing social class relations and power structures — both by those who create the images and by those who become images. And how images influence us as a society, so much so that we can no longer communicate with each other... barely even meet as humans.



## ***What role do the images of others play in this?***

These images of the „Other“ lead to dehumanization. Those who control the images control how the portrayed are perceived. The power to represent the „Other“ becomes the power to define them, shaping their identity and dictating their perception. Often, the image of the „Other“ is constructed as the most negative and fear-inducing version possible and this perpetuates an atmosphere of tension and isolation, where meaningful discourse becomes nearly impossible. As a result, discourse becomes emotionalized and laden with projections. Each side feels misrepresented and misunderstood, worse yet, threatened in their very existence, leading to a breakdown in communication and escalating into social and political hysteria.

## ***The act of burning a sacred text is provocative. What does it represent within the narrative?***

It's not about the act of burning itself, which is obviously an accident. And in the film, we even hear that burning the Quran is not inherently an absolute prohibition, as a Muslim scholar himself says; it's about the intention and also the interpretation. And that's exactly what the burned Quran sets in motion—it's a narrative trigger, an explosion, interpreted differently by everyone.

## ***What does it set in motion?***

The point is that one and the same symbol can represent something completely contradictory to people who are socialized in completely different ways. For each of them, the burned Quran symbolizes something unique, laden with their own cultural codes and historical contexts, as well as personal traumas, myths, family histories, desires, fears.

It's about symbols and burning a Quran is also a symbol. For some, the burned Quran is seen as a sign of Western arrogance towards other cultures, a continuation of the colonial attitude. It stands for hatred of Islam or criticism of Islam. But here too there is more to it than the purely post-colonial and racist reading. Burning a Quran it is also a symbol of freedom of expression.

Historically, the Western has fought for freedom of expression for centuries and has developed a deep-rooted belief in absolute, almost sacred freedom of speech. And this clashes with the religious belief that the Quran is the word of God and stands above everything. Suddenly two worldviews, two beliefs that have developed differently over thousands of years in different geographies around the world collide. And in this coming together that the bang, the explosion, the inferno happens.

## ***Recent acts of arson and hate crimes have shaken Germany. How do these events influence the film's themes?***

It already creates an underlying atmosphere of threat and fear, a real threat, that racist rhetoric and its associated metaphors and images of a „full boat“ will soon lead to actions, as seen in Solingen and Mölln. And for a thriller like Hysteria, the mere mention of certain topics creates a tense atmosphere of threat on a cinematic level.

## ***How does the film address the lingering effects of racism and xenophobia in contemporary Germany?***

Since the Hamas attacks, much like after 9/11, it has become entirely acceptable to talk about „migrants“ (and let's be honest, when we talk about „migrants,“ we mean mostly „Muslims“ or „Africans“) as the root cause of all problems. The images of the Hamas attack and the celebrating Arab boys in Neukölln, or the oppressed and mistreated women in Iran and Afghanistan, have contributed to this narrative. It's not that these images are entirely false or fail to depict alarming realities in the world— they are significant and must be addressed. The problem lies in their exclusivity. By exclusively portraying violent Muslim men and oppressed Muslim women, we reduce and dehumanize these individuals, as evident in current debates, whether during Germany's federal elections or Elon Musk's posts on X. This narrative serves as a distraction from actual systemic issues and sustains the power dynamics of the powerful. This trend of populism thrives on emotionalizing and oversimplifying highly complex systems into reductive narratives, such as the „dangerous Muslim“ or the „evil, degenerate West.“

## ***Can one speak of an image war?***

Yes, but I do not want to relativize the absolutely unjust distribution of the power of images. Certain groups, certain states have more power and control over images, over the media. But in the end, no matter how much power and control someone has, especially through social media, it will always end in a mutual recognition of humanity. It's also essential to acknowledge that Islamist terrorism is itself a consequence of the dehumanization of „Western people.“ When people are no longer seen as human, it becomes easy to drive a vehicle into a Christmas market or drop tons of bombs on refugee camps in Lebanon or Gaza.

## **So, does this justify the violence?**

Not only does one's own violence get justified, but also a sense of moral superiority is created, enabling the domination of the Other. In *Hysteria*, no one asks themselves, „What has this done to me?“ The entire discourse is focused on the Other, interpreting them and stripping them of their autonomy. And this speaking about the Other takes place entirely on a moral level, without understanding or empathy. When we discuss or try to shape society in moral terms, every discussion will end up accusing the side one disagrees with of immorality. It will always conclude with, „This side is bad.“ And this will directly lead to: „You are bad.“ And this sense of moral superiority is violence. And this is brutal; this is hysteria. It is the fire that eventually breaks out and consumes everything equally. The fire, unlike us, makes no distinctions.

## **How does the film navigate the tension of art, faith, and cultural differences?**

The issue is not a conflict between art and faith. Only where faith is used as a justification for state censorship does art find itself in tension with „faith,“ as is the case in many Muslim-majority countries governed by sharia laws.

There has always been a conflict between forward-thinking art and the conservative forces of society that seek to suppress it. This cultural struggle between artists and the state, artists and the church or sharia, has always been a constant point of friction. This tension is a sign that art is touching upon something significant. This brings us to the core of the conflict: what happens when art no longer operates in this field of tension? While cinema offers a unique opportunity to explore complex issues, including cultural differences and political topics, in a nuanced way, there is a tendency to oversimplify these issues and conform to current trends or state policies. On the one hand, art seeks to challenge authoritarian views and push boundaries; on the other hand, it is often dependent on state support and the accompanying bureaucracy, which stifles its freedom and ultimately leads to a crisis of purpose. I do not know whether this crisis of purpose is a consequence of societal conditions or whether cinema, art, literature, and media are themselves part of those conditions. But I believe that cinema, with greater radicalism and courage in pursuing truth, can bring balance to societal conditions and defuse the radical forces within society.

## **How do you hope audiences from different cultural backgrounds will leave the cinema?**

I hope audiences leave with a deeper humility for perspectives other than their own.

When we recognize that our own worldview, with its specific rules and values, does not hold the sole claim to truth, we open ourselves to the complexity of the world. The goal is not to „win“ discourses, but to engage in dialogue and work together to shape coexistence as effectively as possible. This process begins with the acknowledgment that the demonized „Other“ is also human, with feelings, desires, and fears, and might even be right.

## **But if everyone is right, doesn't that lead to hysteria?**

Only if everyone insists that the other is wrong. That leads to hysteria. The denial of the other. Reality is often a collection of different, often contradictory perspectives, which, when taken together, can complement the bigger picture of truth. This can be very difficult to accept, but for me, it is the path to harmony. And cinema embodies this diversity of perspectives. Not that a film is the truth. Never! Never is a movie the truth, but rather a perspective on something. Together, film, literature, and art offer a wealth of perspectives and truths, teaching us to mistrust the omnipotence and universality of our own truth. Instead, we learn to place our perspectives among many others. In this way, communication becomes possible, and through humility before the other, empathy, understanding, and dialogue can emerge.

## **Elif, the protagonist, finds herself caught between conflicting forces. What does her journey symbolize?**

Elif's story is a personal one, that of a „Strebermigrantin“ – a high-achieving migrant - who seeks to move from the world of her origins to the world of her success through diligence and obedience, and while able to navigate both worlds, never feels at home in either. She denies her origins, striving for upward mobility, a goal she achieves easily due to her white appearance. In her struggle with her contradictions, she has chosen one side and suppressed the other. This is also reflected in her negative, racist experiences at school, and her association of „losing“ with her father and his culture. Even in her defiance, as she switches sides, she fails to find balance, to find peace. How could she, in a world that is so utterly divided?

***How do you think the experiences of being Turkish-German influence the way you portray cultural and social tensions in your work?***

Through my migrant background, I am freed from assumptions. There is no fiber of my body, no sentence, and no act of my tradition that I don't also view through the eyes of the Other, thus constantly questioning it. This is especially true for the society in which my Turkish- Sunni bubble was situated. Imagine being born in a household—this is your world—but your small world is surrounded by an enormous, all-determining world that you need to survive. Soon, you enter this foreign world. On the one hand, this world is hostile to your own, and you must explain yourself and your small world. On the other hand, you must learn how to interact with these strange, white people in this larger world, and no one has ever taught you how they behave or speak. That means you are an observer, perhaps an imitator or a rejecter, but either way, it is inevitable that this will have an effect on you. However, in this position of constant observation and analysis, where nothing is taken for granted, one often has a clearer perspective, but remains in a state of constant observation. And especially due to the history of the Third Reich, this takes on a particular weight. Every movement, every new direction is observed and analyzed with absolute attention. One can sense, „Which moment will they explode, and I'll have to leave the country before?“ Irrational, but this is my projection.

***How do you see art, particularly this film, as a tool for challenging racism and fostering dialogue about cultural identity?***

The most important aspect would be the absolute humanization, free from victim or perpetrator clichés. Depicting the complexity of human existence with all its facets will help us recognize that judging a person is impossible, as every individual is the result of their social environment and their socialization. This recognition is particularly crucial in the context of art, as it enables a more profound understanding of the Other. Unfortunately, especially in „well-meaning art,“ there is often a dangerous direction: the victimization of minorities. At first glance, this might seem like a positive approach, but in reality, it leads to dehumanization because it reduces these complex individuals primarily to their „victimhood,“ stripping away their complexity and contradictions. Moreover, this reduction diminishes them by focusing only on their relationship with majority society, as if their existence is only validated through this relation, whether as a victim or perpetrator. Though these portrayals may be motivated by goodwill or, worse, pity, it is precisely because they appear so well-intentioned that these images are often accepted uncritically, even by those being depicted. As a result, they may end up identifying only as victims, rather than as human beings. This undermines their dignity, which art should aim to uphold. Every „stranger“ can trigger not only curiosity but also discomfort and bewilderment; this is a normal reaction. However, instead of addressing these feelings constructively, people often seek to control the Other by definition and devaluation. I believe that, rather than trying to define or reduce the Other, we should focus on what they trigger within us—what they represent as a projection. The way we react to them often reflects more of the viewer's projection than the reality of the viewed. It is impossible to truly know the Other, especially since it takes a lifetime to know oneself. How can you claim to understand the Other based on films and newspaper articles alone? This doesn't mean we shouldn't explore different cultures and their histories, but it should be done with curiosity and humility. It is important to acknowledge that these cultures, in their complexity, cannot be judged or fully understood by an outsider. As someone born and raised in Germany, I have often reflected on this complexity. Germans, to me, are like what Gandalf says about Hobbits: „You can learn them in a month, but it takes a lifetime to understand them.“ Similarly, art's role in challenging racism and fostering dialogue lies in its ability to inspire curiosity and humility while presenting the Other as inherently human.

***How did you approach the challenge of blurring the line between fiction and reality in the film?***

There isn't a clear boundary between them. The point here is that images, fiction, reality, and projection, influenced by existing images, continuously interact to the extent that one can no longer distinguish between them as an effect. „Solingen“ becomes reality, „first the Quran, then the Muslim,“ „they speak of freedom until they come to power, look at Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey“ becomes reality. The images from Solingen or the Quran protests become reality because we accept them unquestioningly, without much contextualization, purely emotionally, as representations of reality.

## ***How did you navigate the balance between personal drama and the larger societal issues symbolized by the burning Quran?***

Here we also tried to work through projection. We don't show the burned Quran, neither when it is being burned nor when it is found. Even the footage is blurred, not by us, but by the producer. Only in the farewell scene do we see its charred remains, because here, for the first time, the Quran doesn't stand for a symbol but for what it means to the devout Majid. The act of burning the Quran, though unintentional in the narrative, becomes a narrative trigger—an explosion of societal implications. This required great sensitivity to handle such a provocative subject. However, I had no fear or shared the concerns of people who heard about this for the first time. It's not about not talking about it or making a film about it; as the Imam in the story also says, it's about the intention. Since we had no provocative intentions, my concern was minimal. Balancing this larger societal theme with the personal drama was a very big challenge as a writer. However, when Devrim Lingnau came into the picture, suddenly, it became much easier. Her contribution helped root the societal dimensions in the personal struggles of the characters, ensuring that both aspects of the narrative remained intertwined and impactful.

## ***What made Devrim Lingnau the right choice to play Elif, and what qualities did she bring to the role?***

In addition to her outstanding acting skills, she has an expression that, especially in its minimalism, offers an absolute projection surface, which is perfect for a thriller. She plays a character who hides and suppresses so much. And, of course, her own biography. I work with the actors' biographies from the casting stage. She was very open and willing to give Elif incredible depth by incorporating her personal biography. We discussed all aspects of her and my life. Even the smallest moments were the focus of our reflections – whether it was her interaction with a Turkish man in a snack bar, where she concealed her Turkish side to be left alone, or her exchanges with her fellow actors, which also triggered something in her. We discussed all these points and incorporated them into the script, which she later integrated into her interpretation of Elif.

## ***How did Devrim Lingnau's background and experiences influence her portrayal of Elif, and how did you work together to explore the character's complexity?***

The very fact that Devrim has parents from two different countries and yet, over the course of her career, chose to use the name of her German mother is almost a symbol for secrets, accusations, and cultural divides. The character of Elif was always written as an „invisible migrant,“ someone who can move unnoticed between worlds due to her appearance. Devrim embodied this character perfectly. Only because of her first name did I know she must have a Turkish background, but how deep this cultural contradiction and all its consequences were for her, we uncovered through intense discussions. We wanted to understand why Elif hides it, why she wants to amputate one side of her identity. In addition to all the layers already present in Elif's character in the script, she brought the nuances and the scene about her father, which she portrayed brilliantly. Before that, I had shot scenes where Elif dreams about her father and later talks to him on the phone, but after hearing her story, they became completely obsolete. It hit the point, and this story, which she shared with me during the shoot, when we were already very close, was a great show of trust. She probably felt that she could now show herself completely and incorporate it into Elif's narrative. It was a huge sign of trust for me, knowing that she trusted me and the project deeply. This trust extended beyond just her portrayal; it also influenced how the character of Elif evolved. Devrim's Turkish-German identity was the occasion for me to truly expose myself, allowing the character to come very close to my own experiences. Initially, in earlier drafts, the character was a German from the upper middle class; then, she became an Eastern European „invisible migrant.“ However, it was only with Devrim that the character's identity shifted to that of a Turkish-German woman. With each iteration, the character came closer to my biography, and it was only through Devrim that she finally reached her truth. We, as border-crossers, share these experiences, which added depth to Elif's narrative. I too constantly switch between different worlds, bubbles, and subcultures, and with this ability to belong everywhere comes the constant attempt to please everyone. For me, this duality was symbolized by my earring—a sort of portal between worlds. Whenever I entered my Muslim world, I took it off. Whenever I entered my Western world, I wore it as a sign that they wouldn't see me as an „Islamist“ because of my films and my often-provocatively interpreted stance—a legitimate concern.

When my parents wanted to visit me on set, I took the earring off for the first time. I couldn't expect absolute honesty from my actors and not live it myself. I wore it again, and except for my father, no one noticed. This was a personal challenge for me because if I had taken it off, they would have noticed and perhaps offered me political encouragement, but not in my personal life.



Devrim understood this duality; she even said she would have noticed if I had taken it off, and it would have raised questions about her own openness. But I believe that acknowledging my own vulnerability and fears—reflected not only in the script but also in reality—was a sign that her openness mattered as much as mine. For aesthetic reasons, but mainly because I no longer needed that „armor,” I ultimately decided to take off the earring for good.

### ***How did the dynamics among the cast and crew influence the portrayal of conflict within the story?***

Of course, the topic of the burned Quran was widely discussed, and there were various opinions, just as other current issues were discussed, such as arms deliveries to Ukraine or economic cooperation with Iran. I tried to incorporate the feelings that arose from these discussions, as well as the trust and mistrust (depending on where people positioned themselves), into the acting. For example, „You had this disagreement—imagine it means he has to make a decision that goes against your stance. What do you feel about him?” Or the prejudice against „Middle Eastern” actors, which I sensed in Devrim and which we addressed intensively down to the roots so she could translate it into her performance.

Also, because we had a young crew, with many female team members, there were one or two small conflicts with male team members. However, these were addressed confidently and calmly by the female team members, which was something the guys from lighting weren’t used to, and it quickly resolved because it was brought up and accepted well by the lighting crew. I was very proud of the young crew.

### ***How does it feel to return to Berlinale after the success of Oray?***

It’s like going back home. Between Oray and Hysteria, there was also Ask, Mark ve Ölüm and this year, alongside Hysteria, Sirens Call, which I accompanied as a Creative Producer with my partner Claus Herzog-Reichel. This is our fourth feature film, and all of them premiered in Berlinale. For us, so far, Berlinale feels like home, but not in a self-evident way. It’s like a home that has strict, performance-oriented parents who only accept you once you’ve earned good grades.

### ***How has your approach to filmmaking evolved, and where do you see this film within the broader landscape of German cinema?***

Unlike Oray, this time I wanted to make a genre film, where a moral question is structured like a crime story. Despite the theoretical framework based on Orientalism theory, I wanted to tell an engaging thriller with psychologically complex characters. The questions of who has the right to play certain roles in film or whether violence is the only means of empowerment for those depicted are meant to linger with the audience after the film. While watching, they should be swept away by the emotional intensity of interpersonal entanglements, activating their primal fears, and by an exciting film and visual language. Similar to crime or horror films, the central question is: who is the perpetrator? The audience must navigate through the confusion of people, languages, and relationships and ask whether any judgment about guilt can even be made. This film fits into the broader landscape of German cinema as one of the many current films that, instead of saying, „let me explain my culture to you,” confidently and critically addresses these complex issues.

### ***What does Devrim’s recognition as a European Shooting Star mean to you as a director, and how does it reflect the importance of her role in this film?***

I’m really proud of her, and no one deserves it more than she does at this time. She brought an incredible dedication, self-discipline, and courage to her own truth, and that it is seen and honored makes me happy. Being a part of her self-exploration makes me happy.



## PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

*Hysteria* intimately examines social inequalities, prejudices, and the challenges of contemporary discourse culture and the ultimate failure of dialogue. Yet the characters are never reduced to symbols or categories—they remain deeply human, brought to life through their multidimensional vulnerabilities and individual psychologies.

The thriller serves as a metaphor for a time when anger and fear dominate public and private discourse, fracturing families, friendships, and communities. Through its layered narrative, the film raises an urgent question: How can we speak and listen to one another in a world of divergent opinions and fragmented realities?

As filmmakers, we see this project as an offering—a cinematic space to confront fear and division and explore the potential for trust and compassion. In a world marked by crises and alienation, *Hysteria* reminds us of the power of dialogue and the courage it takes to forge genuine connections.

**CLAUS HERZOG-REICHEL**



## WORLD SALES



Pluto Film is a Berlin-based world sales and festival distribution company committed to engaging global cinema. We are devoted to bringing quality feature films to the international market and audiences. Our focus is on arthouse and cross-over films, especially those by emerging talents. But we also have a passion for family films and elevated genre.

With a boutique approach, we add around eight titles to our lineup each year, allowing us to give each film the attention and care it deserves. We then navigate the world beyond the window system by finding the right place and time for our films at festivals, in theaters, on TV, and online. Our objective is to circulate our films globally and make them available across all possible distribution channels.

## FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

- 2018 THE BRA — Poetic comedy by Veit Helmer
- 2019 ORAY — Drama by Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay
- 2020 TAILOR — Drama/Romance by Sonia Liza Kenterman
- 2023 ELAHA — Drama by Milena Aboyan
- 2024 WINNERS — Children's Film by Soleen Yusef
- 2025 HYSTERIA — Political Thriller by Mehmet Akif Büyükcatalay





# HYSTERIA

<b>COUNTRY</b>	Germany	<b>WRITER &amp; DIRECTOR</b>	Mehmet Akif Büyükatalay
<b>YEAR</b>	2025	<b>CAST</b>	Devrim Lingnau (as Elif) Mehdi Meskar (as Said) Serkan Kaya (as Yigit) Nicolette Krebitz (as Lilith) Aziz Çapkurt (as Mustafa) Nazmi Kırık (as Majid)
<b>LENGTH</b>	104 min.	<b>CINEMATOGRAPHY</b>	Christian Kochmann
<b>GENRE</b>	Political Thriller	<b>EDITORS</b>	Denys Darahan Andreas Menn
<b>SHOOTING FORMAT</b>	3.6K (Alexa Mini)	<b>PRODUCTION DESIGN</b>	Mayte Hellenthal
<b>SCREENING FORMAT:</b>	DCP 2K	<b>SET SOUND</b>	René Nicklaus
<b>LANGUAGES</b>	German, Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, English	<b>COSTUME DESIGN</b>	Marisa Lattmann
<b>COLOR</b>	Color	<b>MAKE UP</b>	Rudeina Konstantini
<b>PRODUCER</b>	Mehmet Akif Büyükatalay Claus Herzog-Reichel	<b>CASTING</b>	Kerstin Neuwirth
<b>PRODUCTION COMPANY</b>	filmfaust	<b>SOUND DESIGN</b>	Steffen Pfauth
<b>CO-PRODUCER</b>	Christian Cloos	<b>SOUND MIX</b>	Henning Hein
<b>CO-PROD. COMPANY</b>	ZDF/Das kleine Fernsehspiel	<b>MUSIC</b>	Marvin Miller
<b>FUNDED BY</b>	Film- und Medienstiftung NRW Hessen Film & Medien German Federal Film Board (FFA) German Federal Film Fund (DFFF)		
<b>WORLD SALES</b>	Pluto Film		

**DISCLAIMER: NO QUR'AN WAS USED OR BURNED DURING THE MAKING OF THIS FILM.**