



**WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
POWERED BY JAGUAR**

Copilot

+ Q&A with director Anne Zohra Berrached

Anne Zohra Berrached on 'Copilot'

What inspired you to make Copilot?

We live in a time when more and more families and relationships are broken by ideology. Screenwriter Stefanie Misrahi and I wanted to bring a love story to the screen that's damaged by it. We describe the moment before the 'big bang' of polarisation politics, the end of the 1990s, crazy love against the backdrop of a terrible historical event which, by its violence and its symbolic power, generates a lasting void and an enigma in each of us.

This is a film about power and helplessness, life and death, a couple fighting, lying to protect, love and hurt each other. A woman who enters a situation that changes her whole life and upsets the rest of the world. The centre of the story is the tragic figure of Asli, for whom, at the end of the story, something gets destroyed forever. She can't help but wonder if she couldn't have done it another way.

With the producers Roman Paul and Gerard Meixner, I undertook documentation work on terrorists and their wives. This material served as a basis for us, Stefanie and myself, to evoke the fate of two protagonists who emerged partly from our research and partly from our imagination. The film is not based on one specific event, but rather what inspired me by many stories and characters that we have discovered.

Canan Kir and Roger Azar, the actors who play Asli and Saeed, portray their characters over a time period of six years. Tell us how you discovered them.

Even when I was writing the script, I couldn't see myself using the usual method of seeking out a pool of well-known actors. For all my previous films, I had worked with people without acting training for supporting roles. For *Copilot* I wanted to counterbalance the tragic world event towards which the narrative arc of the film travels with the presence of non-professional actors. The idea was to work with new faces, up to the most important roles, in order to achieve maximum authenticity.

Casting director Susanne Ritter and I organised a process which lasted almost a year. We met with over 500 amateur actors and actresses. Canan Kir quickly took on the role of Asli. She has what I love about an actor – the gift of projecting oneself into situations, of making them really exist. And Canan has something unique: the existential drama can be read in her eyes. But I had a hard time finding an actor for the male lead.

Our film begins with a young man born to war-traumatised parents who just arrived from Lebanon, a country that had to be rebuilt. I realised that we would have to find our actor in Lebanon. With the producer Roman Paul, screenwriter Stefanie Misrahi, and Beirut casting director Abia Khoury, we held auditions in English and in French with 120 actors for three weeks in Beirut. Roger Azar was the penultimate actor to enter the room. I'll never forget the strength, empathy and pride with which he played Saeed.

Throughout the shoot, we tried to retain this initial performance. But my working method does not favour repetition: there are never two identical takes.

I knew we had discovered great talents, but they had to improvise in German and not just memorise a script. Roger had to learn to think in German to be able to react spontaneously. We provided him with an apartment in Berlin and, with the help of the Goethe Institute, we got him to take German lessons six days a week for almost a year. Not only is Roger a great talent as an actor, but he's very good at learning languages.

How did you prepare for the shoot?

Canan Kir, Roger Azar and I started our improvised rehearsals a year before the filming. During the first phase, my concern was to lay the foundations and build a relationship of trust with the actors. Every other weekend we met in my living room to rehearse their married life in general: two people who fall love, a relationship, domestic problems ...

The second step, before the actors even read the script, was to do rehearsals. We improvised situations from the script: I indicated the situations, and Canan and Roger interpreted. The rehearsals were filmed and evaluated, and the script was changed. Sometimes we rewrote entire scenes in terms of sequence and dialogue. The script was therefore in fact created by the interplay between the sensitivities and improvisation of the actors.

After about six months of purely improvised work, Canan and Roger read the script for the first time. We immediately started to analyse the script together. We changed some scenes once more and I was able to go into filming with a clear idea, which allowed us to avoid questions, discussions, and ambiguities when we were filming.

About the director

Born in Erfurt, in the former GDR in 1982. After graduating in social education, she worked as a drama teacher in London. She then took up a degree at the Film Academy Baden-Württemberg where she directed the short documentary *Saint & Whore*, which was selected by over 80 international film festivals. Her debut feature film, *Two Mothers*, screened in the 2013 *Perspektive Deutsches Kino* where it won the Dialogue en perspective award. Her second feature, *24 Weeks*, premiered in the Berlinale *Competition* and received the German Film Award in Silver.

Production notes

COPILOT (DIE FRAU DES PILOTEN)

Directed by: Anne Zohra Berrached
Production Company: Razor Film Produktion GmbH
in co-production with: Haut et Court, zero one film, Norddeutscher Rundfunk, Arte France Cinéma
With the support of: ARTE
Producers: Roman Paul, Gerard Meixner
Casting: Susanne Ritter
Casting Lebanon: Abia Khoury
Written by: Stefanie Misrahi
Director of Photography: Christopher Aoun
Editor: Denys Darahan
Art Director: Janina Schimmelbauer
Costume Designer: Melina Scappatura
Make-up: Nicola Faas, Vanessa Schneider
Music: Evgueni Galeperine, Sacha Galeperine
Sound Design: Niklas Kammertöns, Marc Fragstein
Production Sound Mixer: Gregor Bonse
Sound: Sylvain Rémy, Uve Hassig

Cast

Canan Kir (*Asli*)
Roger Azar (*Saeed*)
Jana Julia Roth (*Jaqui*)
Darina Al Joundi (*Suleima*)
Nicolas Chaoui (*Fares*)
Céci Chuh (*Julia*)
Aziz Dyab (*Karim*)
Özay Fecht (*Zeynep*)
Zeynep Ada Kienast (*Ebru*)

Germany/France 2021

118 mins

Courtesy of Modern Films



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