

KINO LORBER

Presents

**BERLIN
ALEXANDERPLATZ**

A Film by Burhan Qurbani

Germany | 2020 | 183min | Color | Soninke, Portuguese, German, English

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Synopsis

An African immigrant struggles to make a new life for himself in the big city in director-co-writer Burhan Qurbani's (*We Are Young. We Are Strong.*) audacious, neon-lit reinterpretation of Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel. After surviving his perilous journey, Francis vows to be a good man, but he soon realizes how difficult it is to be righteous while undocumented in Germany – without papers, without a nationality, and without a work permit. When he receives an enticing offer for easy money from the psychopathic gangster Reinhold (Albrecht Schuch), Francis initially resists temptation, but eventually he is sucked into Berlin's underworld and his life spirals out of control.

– Alissa Simon

Director's Note

What began as an exciting thought experiment, a game with the idea of reinterpreting and updating the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin, that I loved and hated and still love and hate, has taken on new form over the seven years of its development to its completion, today.

I grew up with *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Not so much with Fassbinder's series that was broadcast in my year of birth [1980] and to which I only found access late, but much more with the book that I first read when I was 17 and then when I was 18 and then when I was 19. In the beginning I wanted to find a narrative key that would give me access to the novel in our present. The decision to tell the film from the perspective of a black refugee was not obvious but was additionally driven by the urge to give a face to a structurally discriminated and discredited community. Just like Franz Biberkopf from the novel, a petty criminal and casual worker in the 1930s, our Francis/Franz today, a particle on the edge of the city of Berlin, he is the "scum of society," if you will.

But it soon became clear that I wasn't just interested in a story about refugees in Berlin, but that I could tell something about the structures of racism. An imbalance of power. The undercurrent of oppression. With the choice of a black protagonist and his white antagonist, Reinhold, my story of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* changed to a postcolonial allegory.

Walter Benjamin spoke of Döblin's character Franz as a character from the dirt with the hubris of wanting to become part of the bourgeoisie: "A hunger for fate which consumes him [Franz], because he demands more from life than just a bed and a piece of buttered bread." As a child of Afghan refugees, I myself know this hunger so well. I also understand its dangers. It is this hunger that attracts the devil. It leads Franz/Franz through different incarnations until he can finally be torn apart, emptied and reborn. Today, seven years after the first idea for the film, the movie has taken on a new colour in a Europe that is bound together by effort and misery and that is torn from the outside as well as from the inside. At the beginning of the film my Franz is washed up on the coast of this unsettled continent. A stranger in a strange land. He has no language, no job, no papers. He is in every sense of the word impotent.

He is washed of his past. Only guilt remains. He has to regain his dignity, for dignity is the first thing one loses, when he has to flee. At the emotional climax of the movie Franz echoes Hannah Arendt's words when he cries out: "I hate when they call me refugee."

Later he continues: "I am Germany." I find this the most dangerous line of this film, for today one might find his cry sounds very much like "I am Europe." Of course, in the limited narrative time of a feature film, we couldn't process the full spectrum of Döblin's novel. But we strictly adhered to the narrative beats of his book. Below all lies the story of guilt and a new beginning. Of sacrifice and redemption. The vow to become a better man. The crime plot, which also structure the novel, runs through the middle of the film. But above all lies the strange, terribly, destructive ménage à trois between the lovers Franz and Mieze and Reinhold. The eternal tug of warping of Eros and Thanatos, love and death, for the human soul. so , what you're seeing today is an attempt at a cinematic fresco. The themes we work on are like pigments we paint in the fresh lime of a constantly changing world. The film is just the day's work, the giornata, and as such it will have a different effect tomorrow. It is a dangerous picture for film must be dangerous. And in the end, you will find there is a utopia, the possibility of arriving, of home - for art must dream of the impossible.

Crew Bios

Burhan Qurbani

Director

In 1979, Burhan Qurbani's parents fled to Germany as political refugees. He was born in 1980 and grew up in various German cities, due to his father's work for the US army. After his high school graduation in 2000 he gained experience at theatres in Stuttgart and Hannover. From 2002 he studied directing at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. His student short films won prizes at many international film festivals. In 2010 his graduation film "Shahada" screened in competition at Berlinale and was critically acclaimed and awarded at many festivals around the world. With the short documentary "Krieger ohne Feind" (Warrior Without Enemy), Burhan participated in the documentary project "20x Brandenburg", which won the prestigious Grimme Award in 2011. Qurbani's second fiction feature "We are Young. We are Strong." (2014) opened the competition at both the Rome International Film Festival and Hof International Film Festival and received multiple awards worldwide.

Yoshi Heimrath

Director of Photography

Yoshi Heimrath was born in Munich in 1983. Since 2009, he works as Director of Photography in advertising and feature film productions. During his studies at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, he received the German Camera Award in 2008 for his short film "Illusion". In 2010, he was involved in Burhan Qurbani's feature film "Shahada", which participated in the Berlinale competition. Furthermore, Heimrath received the First Steps Camera Award for this film. For Burhan Qurbani's "We are young, We are strong", Heimrath was nominated for Best Cinematography at the German Film Awards 2015. Most recently, Heimrath was involved in the

modern adaption or Alfred Döblin's famous novel "Berlin Alexanderplatz" as well as the second season of the coming-of-age comedy-drama "How sell drugs online (fast)".

Cast

Franz - Welket Bungué
Reinhold - Albrecht Schuch
Mieze - Jella Haase
Pums - Joachim Król
Eva - Annabelle Mandeng
Berta - Nils Verkooijen
Ottu - Richard Fouofié Djimeli

Crew

Directed by
Burhan Qurbani

Screenplay by
Martin Behnke & Burhan Qurbani

Producers
Leif Alexis, Jochen Laube, Fabian Maubach

Co-Producers
Leontine Petit, Erik Glijnis

Commissioning Editors
Burkhard Althoff (ZDF), Olaf Grunert (ZDF/ARTE)

Director of photography
Yoshi Heimrath

Casting by
Suse Marquardt & Alexandra Koknat

Line producer
Michael Jungfleisch, Sophie Cocco

Set designer
Silke Buhr

Costume designer
Anna Wübber

Make-up artist
Marcela Barreto

Editor
Philipp Thomas

Music by
Dascha Dauenhauer

Production
Sommerhaus Filmproduction

Co-production
ZDF in collaboration with ARTE, Lemming Film, in collaboration with Wild at Art

Technical Details

Shooting Locations
Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, NRW, Südafrika

Shooting time
18/05/23 - 18/07/23, 18/12/18 + 18/12/19 (42 DT)

Running time
183 minutes

Screen Ratio
1:2.39

Format
2k DCP

Kino Lorber

With a library of over 4,000 titles, Kino Lorber Inc. has been a leader in independent art house distribution for 35 years, releasing 30 films per year theatrically under its Kino Lorber, Kino Repertory and Alive Mind Cinema banners, garnering seven Academy Award® nominations in nine years. In addition, the company brings over 350 titles yearly to the home entertainment and educational markets through physical and digital media releases. With an expanding family of distributed labels, Kino Lorber handles releases in ancillary media for Zeitgeist Films, Cohen Media Group, Greenwich Entertainment, Artsploitation, Palisades Tartan, Menemsha Films, Raro Video, and others, placing physical titles through all wholesale, retail, and direct to consumer channels, as well as direct digital distribution through over 40 OTT services including all major TVOD and SVOD platforms. In 2019, the company launched its new art house digital channel Kino Now which features over 1000 titles from the acclaimed Kino Lorber library. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kino Marquee initiative was launched in 2020 pioneering "virtual theatrical" releases of art house films with revenue shares that allows audiences to support almost 400 local independent theaters.