

RHIM IBRIR in

Berlinale
72^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum

PRESSKIT

EUROPE

with Rhim Ibrir, Didier Cuillierier, Thierry Cantin, Khadra Bekkouche, Nouria Lakhri, Sadya Bekkouche, Hassane Ziani, Zouhlikha Ibrir, Amandine Demuyck, Nawel Kefif, Frédéric Guesdon, Sahra Boukhenoufa, Nordine Kefif, Thomas Blanchard, Jane Resmond, Laurence Masliah, Marwane Sabri | Script: Merle Kröger, Philip Scheffner | Director: Philip Scheffner | Assistant Director: Pascal Capitelin | 2nd Assistant Director: João Carvalho | Director of Photography: Volker Sattel | Gaffer: Tarek Shayne Tabet | Sound Rec.: Tristan Pontécaille | Costume Design: Sandrine Bonheure | Production Design: Nicolas Lefebvre | Color Grading: Matthias Behrens | Sound Design & Mix: Simon Bastian | Producers: Caroline Kirberg, Merle Kröger | Co-Producers: Thomas Micoulet, Karim Aitouna, Meike Martens | Commissioning Editor: Rolf Berghann

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EUROPE

PHILIP SCHEFFNER

(Germany / France 2021)

Theatrical Release Germany: 10.03.2022
World Sales & Festival Strategy: Square Eyes

Fiction Feature, 105 minutes, DCP-2K, 1:1,85 / 16:9, Colour,
Original Language (French / Arabic) with English subtitles

Script	Merle Kröger, Philip Scheffner
Director & Editor	Philip Scheffner
Assistant Director	Pascal Capitolin
2nd Assistant Director	João Carvalho
Director of Photography	Volker Sattel
Non-Actors Casting	P. Scheffner, P Capitolin, C. Kirberg
Actors Casting	Bahijja El Amrani
Sound Recording	Tristan Pontécaille
Sound Design & Mix	Simon Bastian
VFX	Domingo Stephan
Colour Grading	Matthias Behrens
Costume Designer	Sandrine Bonheure
Production Designer	Nicolas Lefebvre
Gaffer	Tarek Shayne Tabet
Line Producers	Caroline Kirberg, Thomas Micoulet
Producers	Caroline Kirberg, Merle Kröger
Co-Producer	Meike Martens
Co-Producers	Thomas Micoulet, Karim Aitouna
Commissioning Editor	Rolf Bergmann
Produced by	pong film
In Co-Production with	Haut les Mains Productions, Blinker Filmproduktion, Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma

Logline

A bus stop, a square, a few blocks on a suburban road. Zohra Hamadi, metal rods down her spine, gets off the bus. She walks upright, finally able to breathe easily. But Europe only grants her a few days of respite. Zohra Hamadi decides to reach out to the future. EUROPE - a story of forced fiction.

((NOISE))

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SYNOPSIS

The bus stop “Europe” is located on an arterial road in a small suburb in the French town of Chatellerault. A few blocks, a brasserie, a kebab shop and a bus that shuttles between the hospital and the forest, a recreation area outside the city. This is where Zohra Hamadi, 32, lives, her summer beginning with the end of a long history of illness. For the first time in her life, Zohra can walk upright, virtually pain-free – she can lead a completely normal life from now on, says the doctor to whom she owes her physical freedom. A completely normal life: Zohra’s flat is in one of the blocks, family and friends all live close by, she has found work at an NGO that deals in second-hand clothes. If only it weren’t for her husband Hocine, waiting in Algeria to finally get a family reunification visa and board the next plane to Zohra.

It’s summer, the end of July, and all of France is preparing for the holidays on both sides of the Mediterranean. Zohra just needs to renew her residence permit, then she too will leave to spend at least a few weeks with Hocine in the Algerian mountains. But the extension doesn’t come: With the end of her treatment, Zohra loses her right of residence in France. She becomes – for her social environment as well as for the cinema audience – a protagonist forced into invisibility, silenced. It is only through the eyes and reactions of others that one senses Zohra’s struggle to secure a life of long desired normality: how she doesn’t wish to show any weakness, entangles herself in lies, how her world crumbles. Zohra loses her job and her flat. Family and friends leave, she stays back alone in an empty world.

This empty world becomes a stage for Zohra, equipped with a handful of keys to the flats of others. She reclaims visibility by inventing her future, and not just one, but several, which she plays out in variations. Her fictions, sometimes subtle, sometimes pretentiously bourgeois, are not quite grounded in facts and draw us into a charade of parallel unfolding realities. She lives with Hocine, or she doesn’t, she has a family, perhaps, a new job, a residence permit.

By reclaiming fictional visibility, Zohra’s struggle for her space in Europe begins, even if she has to change scenarios more and more often. This lends her a transparent, ghostly quality – the refugee becomes a fugitive eluding the systematic grip of the state authorities.

CAST:

Zohra	Rhim Ibrir
Doctor	Thierry Cantin
Busdriver	Didier Cuillierier
Nesrin's Daughter Khadra	Khadra Bekkouche
Nesrin's Daughter Imane	Nouria Lakhrissi
Nesrin	Sadya Bekkouche
Farid	Hassane Ziani
Grandmother	Zoulikha Ibrir
Zohra's Colleague	Amandine Demuynck
Neighbour (Hostess)	Nawel Kefif
Physio Therapist	Frédéric Guesdon
Neighbour (Couple)	Sarah Boukhenouf
Neighbour (Couple)	Nordine Kefif
Prefecture Employee	Thomas Blanchard
Prefecture Employee	Jane Resmond
Advocate	Laurence Masliah
Omar	Marwane Sabri

RHIM IBRIR IS ZOHRA HAMADI

How EUROPE came to be

Rhim Ibrir is dreaming.

It is beautiful. It is outside. It is not cold and it is not too warm. It is a small garden. The smell of the plants, of mint. You can hear the birds. It is a garden surrounded by a hedge. Behind me is a large window belonging to the living room. From the living room you walk out the door into the well-tended, thoughtfully laid out garden. What do I see in front of me? Trees, a few children's toys, a two-seated garden bench. There's no one there but me. It's like taking a little break to have a coffee.

We met Rhim Ibrir in 2014 when we were doing research for HAVARIE. Although she already lived in Châtelleraut then, we found her by way of Algeria, by way of stories about her. It's summertime. We are shooting in Châtelleraut. We shoot footage that won't be seen in the film, though it will be heard: fragmentary memories of Algeria, the serious illness, the treatment, the waiting. Waiting for her next operation, for her residency permit, for her husband, for the other, real, "ordinary" life.

Completing HAVARIE brings variety into the endless holding patterns. Rhim Ibrir travels to film festivals, watches films, takes a liking to the life of the cinema. And the camera, too, takes a liking to Rhim Ibrir. Something remains, an intensity as an imprint in visual memory.

Rhim Ibrir looks into the camera.

I'm laughing. You can see it in my eyes – You can tell right away by looking at my face whether I'm doing well or not. Everyone says so. But that also means: I can't hide anything.

Rhim Ibrir becomes the fictional character Zohra Hamadi. Zohra Hamadi travels to Châtelleraut, gets off the bus at the *Europe* bus stop and meets Rhim Ibrir. They like each other. The beginning of a new film. Rehearsing scenes. Locations. Community. Casting. The market. The shopping centre. The recreation area. The hospital. Friends. Family. The doctor. The bus driver. Colleagues. Conflating the documentary and the fictional.

Rhim Ibrir talks about Zohra Hamadi.

It's not the kind of film that tells you what to do because the story says so. And later, when the film is over, "Zohra" goes back to her life and that's it. But here – she's enacting all this, but it's not an act for her. For her, what she's playing is real. The film does not end. Even when she leaves the film, she's still living what she played.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The French state has revoked Rhim Ibrir's residency permit and thus her right to be present and participate in a shared social space.

She is being made invisible and inaudible – but has not disappeared.

Rhim Ibrir has become Zohra Hamadi.

A fictional life.

A life in fiction.

A feature film.

The filmic space blurs the boundaries set from the outside and pushes open the door to a world where nothing is assured and everything seems possible.

Fiction as an act of resistance.

The lead actor knows more than her audience.

She insists upon her place in reality.

In Europe.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO PHILIP SCHEFFNER

EUROPE is your first film that largely moves away from documentary and heads more into the direction of fiction. Was that a conscious decision already at the beginning of this project?

I don't know if that's really true - "documentary" and "fiction" have never been opposing pairs for me, but are rather integral and interwoven components of my experience of reality. I think there are also many levels in my other films that open up an in-between space that extends into the fictional. The difference is perhaps that in EUROPE the question of "fiction" and "fictionalisation" is central. We – that refers to the author Merle Kröger, Pascal Capitolin, who supported me in directing, the producer Caroline Kirberg and Volker Sattel on the camera – have very concretely dealt with conventions and working methods of fictional film, questioned, dismantled and (re)appropriated them.

The basis of the film EUROPE is a documentary research based on the biography of the protagonist Rhim Ibrir. The confrontation with the reality of her life led inevitably in the direction of fiction.

You met the main actress Rhim during the research for HAVARIE. When was the moment when you decided to make a film with her and her story?

For the film HAVARIE, I shot documentary footage with Rhim. Conversations in the park, situations in the kitchen, walks through the neighbourhood. In the process, I learned a lot about her biography, the place in France where she lives, her friends and family – it was a very intense encounter.

Due to the conception of the film HAVARIE, I then only used part of the recorded sound and nothing of the image. This was the right decision for HAVARIE, but it left an ever louder voice in the back of my head to deal with the material again. Merle Kröger and I were simply fascinated by her presence in front of the camera. By her quiet, withdrawn and yet intense charisma and the strength and pride with which she lives her life. Working together on the film HAVARIE had created a basis of trust that we could build on. This enabled us to try out things that were new to all of us.

The film follows a clear aesthetic concept, which, as with all your films, is always very strongly linked to the narrative. How can one imagine your approach?

The aesthetic concept, as you call it, arises from the examination of the subject matter of the film. I see it as a reflection with cinematic means. The protagonist of the film has her residence permit revoked. First of all, this means the withdrawal of a common social space. The space in which people can meet is separated along state decisions. Borders are drawn that massively restrict the scope of action of the people concerned and place them in a space of social fiction.

The logline says that EUROPE tells the story of a "state-enforced fictionalisation" (forced fiction). Can you tell us how this came about and what it means for you as a filmmaker?

I realised that working with classic documentary methods would have obscured Rhim's real life situation: How can I make a film with a person who is not actually allowed to be there, whose real presence on location is therefore actually fictitious? This forced fictionalisation is constitutive for her personal life reality but also for her encounter with me. There is a border between us that cannot simply be dissolved by "talking about". Therefore, together with Merle Kröger, I decided to examine the methods of cinematic fiction for their relevance in relation to the protagonist's life reality and to see what scope this could open up. Rhim became Zohra ...

Did anything change in the collaboration with Rhim when the film became fiction?

I believe that the preoccupation with fiction has above all led to a great openness. Positions and relationships could be playfully renegotiated. The discussion of the script, the intensive rehearsal work and ultimately the shooting itself have repeatedly opened up other perspectives on both the personal and the political situation – for me, for the team and of course for Rhim. Rhim has appropriated this space of fiction, conquered it. She has filled it with new facets of herself. Rhim became Zohra and both influenced and changed each other – the transitions between film and reality blurred. Rhim herself describes this very clearly: "The film doesn't stop – even when she (Zohra) leaves the film, she still lives what she played before."

WAYWARD FICTIONS

Essay von Nicole Wolf

EUROPE – AS BUS STOP, HABITAT, BORDER; AS THE PRESENT, FUTURE, TEMPORALITY ASTRAY; AS FICTION – CINEMATIC, FORCED STATE FICTION, DEFIANT SKETCH OF HER LIFE; AS CHARACTER, IMAGINED FRAME, FUGITIVE LIFE, RIDDLE; AS CONVENTIONS REFUSED, PROFOUNDLY SHAKEN GROUNDS, THROWN OUT OF STORY, STRUCTURAL RACIALISED VIOLENCE PERCEPTIBLE.

Zohra Hamadi, EUROPE's protagonist (played by Rhim Ibrir), is visible first through an image, namely X-rays of her spine. The difficult medical treatments she had endured are declared successful. Now she can start her 'normal' life, conventionally perceived as an existence embedded in one's surroundings, through work, family, friends, neighbours, going about daily routines – a life visible, audible, perceptible. As a film spectator this is how I initially meet Zohra, a character whose actions and relations I can follow and connect to – per cinematic habits – if only ever partially. EUROPE however unfolds Zohra's story through four consecutive sonic and visual registers, increasingly troubling my mediated relation to her character. I find myself bereft of a stable foundation from which I can determine where in the narrative she is and who is driving it – this is, if I ever thought of myself to be in possession of this knowledge. The cinematic contract I believed I entered is stretched to breaking point as counter shots disappear, sound is sucked away, and temporalities drift. All while Zohra – wilful, playful and confident – takes her image, time, and story into her own hands and imagination, leaving me a spectator in a potent cinematic gap with urgent political possibilities.

The spaces between

In Philip Scheffner's HAVARIE (2016) we hear Rhim Ibrir, her voice a sonic intimacy conjoined with varied soundscapes and together with the accounts the words of others in an audible web, while we incessantly look at blue of the Mediterranean Sea from the perspective of a cruise ship, with a small rubber boat in the distance carrying people. Merle Kröger's multi perspective crime novel Havarie introduces Zohra Hamadi, determined to stay in France, waiting for her future husband, who is supposed to arrive from Algeria that night.

HAVARIE and Havarie developed out of a shared research process that followed in detail and with detours multiple stories and histories connected to the Mediterranean Sea. Both film and novel work with and upon time, in different media, through different formal choices. Short, fast paced sentences, a literature that is restless; a short video stretched to 90 minutes viewing time with sparing change of focus. Both forms of articulation produce gaps and spaces – gaps of knowledge, gaps in biographies, gaps between image and sound, spaces to think, spaces to experience discomfort. Both film and book expand what is perceived as documentary practice for political ends. They question event and victim-bound news reportage by defying conventions and structural politics that ossify Us and Them dichotomies, thereby interrogating the fiction that is Europe, the fiction that causes countless deaths.

In EUROPE Rhim Ibrir plays Zohra Hamadi and says: "... she is enacting all this, but it's not an act for her. For her, what she is playing is real. The film does not end. Even when she leaves the film, she's still living what she played."

One of the crucial contributions of Merle Kröger and Philip Scheffner to documentary practice and discourse has been their rigour in at once interrogating the strategies of state political structures as well as how forces are mediated in different contexts, including their own image, sound, and storytelling strategies. Documentary or fictional modes are never requirements to be fulfilled, but always something to be critically scanned. Formal decisions are always political, aesthetic, and technical interventions, reflective of one's own tools and their impact. Disciplined and careful study of the expectations raised by genres as well as the strategies they employ has lead to a number of notable past collaborations, whether the anti-colonial ghost story THE HALFMOON FILES (2007), the political nature film THE DAY OF THE SPARROW (2010) or the court room film turned cinematic tribunal

with REVISION (2012). Taking the parameters of genres seriously while employing them waywardly opens up possibilities for novel relations to protagonists while enabling spectators to unlearn conventions. This might lead to expanding who and what constitutes a testimony, unlearning to not see war embedded in a landscape or relistening to colonial audio recordings. Revising how stories are conventionally told, locating multiple beginnings and refusing narrative closure, confronting time as medium and method of violence, and seeking new forms of cinematic address that leverage the position of a comfortable spectator remain key aspects of Kröger and Scheffner's filmmaking and writing practices. Importantly, instead of resolution or repair, by foregrounding how bound we are by conventions, mediated and political, each of their works offer a structure of responsibility.^[1]

State-enforced fiction

EUROPE's fictional mode developed thus not only through a documentary process –begun through research for *Havarie/HAVARIE* – and collaborative rehearsals for different lives at fiction film sets in Chatellerault. EUROPE takes utterly seriously the conceptual and political demand of the state's enforced fiction upon the protagonist Zohra Hamadi, making her disappear, making it impossible for her to lead that 'normal' life. A powerful tool of this violent fiction is once again, time. State bureaucracy can only spare two minutes of their time, a lawyer maybe five to seven minutes. How can this violent fiction be critically mediated using its own force, undermining it at the same time and henceforth abandoning it? Zohra Hamadi, seizing the liberty to determine her own time and format her own story, defies precisely the violence of the often deathly fiction of the state. The form of address EUROPE that hereby offers, the destabilisation a spectator might experience during the duration of the film, might be a rare opportunity to be leveraged out of conventions, in that gap of not-knowing perceive otherwise, not assuming but labouring over possible relations.

EUROPE takes 'fiction as method' to the necessary limit.^[2] Closely interrogating the mechanisms of forced fictions, and studying habituated conventions of fiction as genre, the film bypassing all of it for fiction that refuses and resists, while never forgetting the violence fictions are capable of enacting. This is no less than a matter of survival. EUROPE makes this powerfully and cinematically perceptible. It's not an act, the film does not end.

Nicole Wolf lives in Berlin and London. She is a lecturer in Visual Cultures (Goldsmiths, University of London) and editor of *Grenzfälle. Dokumentarische Praxis zwischen Film und Literatur bei Merle Kröger und Philip Scheffner*. Berlin, Vorwerk 8, 2021.

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^[1] See also: Nicole Wolf (ed.), *Grenzfälle. Dokumentarische Praxis zwischen Film und Literatur bei Merle Kröger und Philip Scheffner*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8. 2021.

^[2] See also: Jon K Shaw & Theo Reeves-Evison (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017.

PHILIP SCHEFFNER

Author | Director | Editor | Producer (pong Film, Berlin)

born 1966 in Homburg/Saar, lives and works as an artist and filmmaker in Berlin. Between 1990 – 2000, numerous short and feature-length films with the Berlin-based authors' group dogfilm. Together with Merle Kröger, Alex Gerbault, Caroline Kirberg and Mareike Bernien he runs the production platform pong. In the Berlinale Forum with *Havarie* (2016), *And-Ek Ghes...* (2016), *Revision* (2012), *The Day of the Sparrow* (2010), *The Halfmoon Files* (2007). Scheffner is Professor of Documentary Practices at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne (KHM) since October 2021. His new film *Europe*, the first feature film production in collaboration with actors and non-actors, will celebrate its premiere at the Berlinale 2022 and will be released in German cinemas in spring by Grandfilm.

Filmography (Selection)

- 2022** **EUROPE** | fiction feature | 105 min | WP: Berlinale Forum 2022
- 2016** **HAVARIE** | documentary feature | 93 min | WP: Berlinale Forum 2016 | Awards: Award of the German Film Critics Association as Best Experimental Film | Arte-Award Duisburg Film Week | Best International Feature Film L'Alternativa Barcelona | Best Editing in an International Feature RIDM Montreal | Special Mention Prix Georges de Beauregard International FID Marseille
- 2016** **AND-EK GHES ...** | documentary feature | 94 min | co-dir: Colorado Velcu | WP: Berlinale Forum 2016 | Awards: nominated for the Grimme Award | nominated for the Award of the German Film Critics Association as Best Documentary and for Best Camera
- 2012** **REVISION** | documentary feature | 106 min | WP: Berlinale Forum 2012 | Awards: Bild-Kunst Award for Best Edit | Award of Excellence Yamagata IDF | nominated for the Award of the German Film Critics Association as Best Documentary | pre-selected for the German Film Award Documentary | Fritz-Gerlich-Film Award Filmfest München | Documentary Film Award GoEast Filmfestival
- 2010** **THE DAY OF THE SPARROW** | documentary feature | 100 Min | WP: Berlinale Forum 2010 | Awards: German Documentary Film Award of the City of Ludwigsburg | Klaus-Wildenhahn-Award at Hamburg Documentary Film Week
- 2007** **THE HALFMOON FILES** | documentary feature | 87 min | WP: Berlinale Forum 2007 | Awards: Documentary Film Award of the Goethe Institut at Duisburg Film Week | Award of the City of Duisburg at Duisburg Film Week | Best Documentary Film at International Independent Filmfestival Mar del Plata | Prix des Mediathèques FID Marseille | Award for Best Documentation and Research Work Memorimage Film Festival Reus

further info at: <http://pong-berlin.de>

MERLE KRÖGER

Author | Producer (pong Film, Berlin)

born 1967 in Plön/Schleswig-Holstein, lives and works as a writer, screenwriter and dramaturge in Berlin. She was a member of the Berlin group dogfilm from 1992 – 1999, and of pong Film since 2001. Kröger is co-writer of Philip Scheffner's award-winning feature films such as The Day of the Sparrow (2010), Revision (2012) and Havarie (2016). Scheffner's new film Europe, for which Kröger is responsible for the screenplay, will premiere at the Berlinale 2022. Kröger has published five novels to date, including Grenzfall (2012), Havarie (2015) and Die Experten (2021). Her novels have won many awards, including Best Crime Novel of the Year, the Radio Bremen Crime Prize and the German Crime Prize.

since 2007: Coordinator and lecturer for script development at the Doc Station & jury member of the Script Station, Berlinale Talent Campus/ Berlinale Talents (coordinator until 2010).

since 2011: Co-director, mentor and lecturer of the Professional Media Master Class for Documentary Film (2011-2014) and the PMMC Lab for Moving Image (2015/ 2016), werkleitz, Halle (Saale) Guest lecturer a.o.: HU Berlin, HGB Leipzig, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Films (Author: Selection)

2021 EUROPE | fiction feature | dir: Philip Scheffner

2016 HAVARIE | documentary feature | dir: Philip Scheffner

2016 AND-EK GHES ... | documentary feature | dir: Philip Scheffner, Colorado Velcu

2015 SHAB | fiction feature | dir: Onir, prod: anticlock films Mumbai

2013 FIGHT REPUBLIC | children fiction feature | prod: Blinker Filmproduktion Cologne

2012 REVISION | documentary feature | dir: Philip Scheffner

2011 I AM | fiction feature | dir: Onir, prod: anticlock films Mumbai

2010 DER TAG DES SPATZEN | documentary feature | dir: Philip Scheffner

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<https://europe.pong-berlin.de>

www.grandfilm.de

<https://merlekroeger.de/de/5/europe>

<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/die-filme-von-philip-scheffner-die-zwei-seiten-der-medienwirklichkeit/26773850.html>

<https://pong-berlin.de/de>

produced by:

pong film **HAUT LES MAINS**



developed / funded by:

