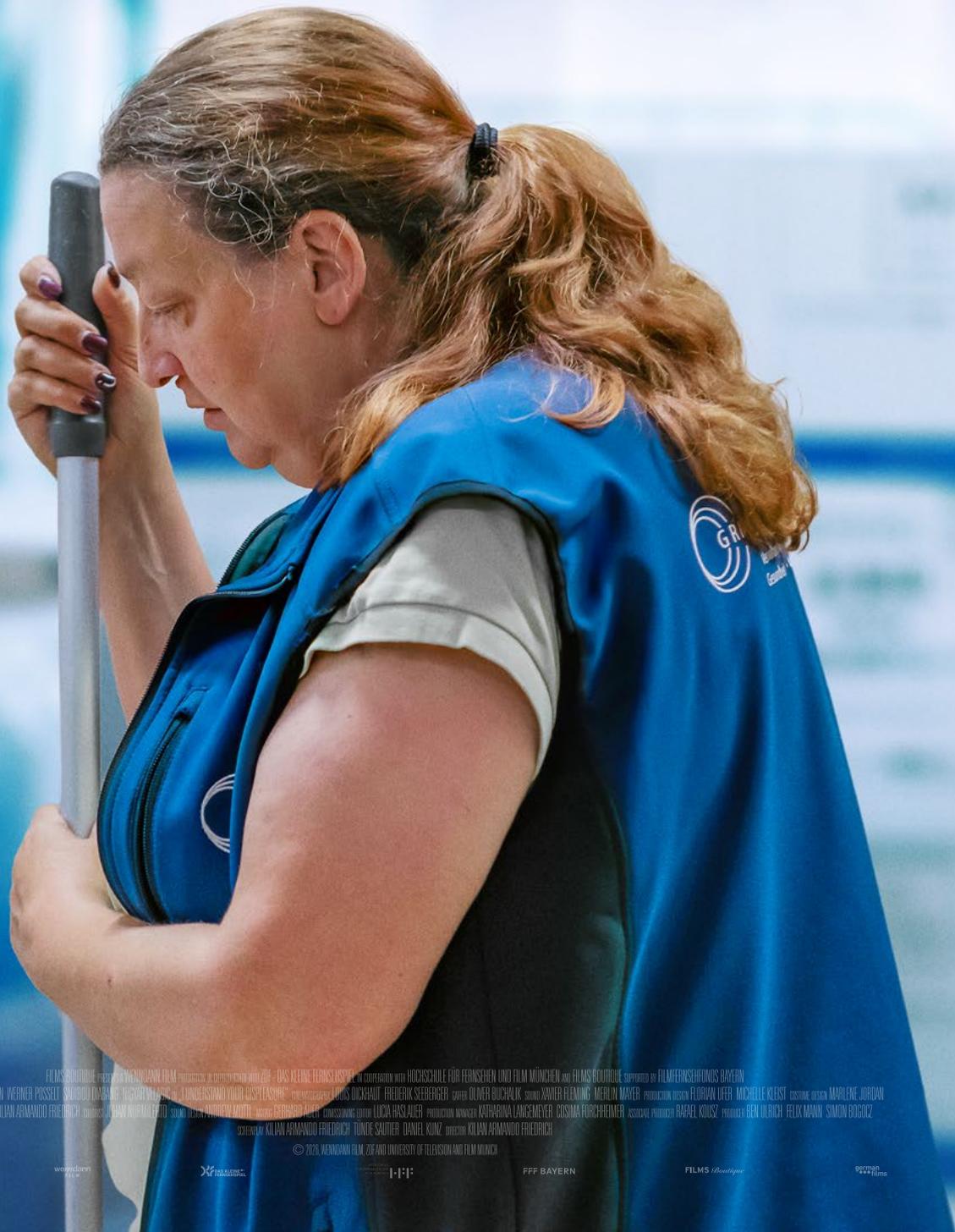




76. Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Berlinale Panorama

I UNDERSTAND YOUR DISPLEASURE

A FILM BY
KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH



FILMS & OUTLINE PRESENTS AN ANIMAFILM PRODUCTION IN COOPERATION WITH ZDF - DAS KLEINE FERNSCHIFFER IN COOPERATION WITH HOCHSCHULE FÜR FERNSEHEN UND FILM MÜNCHEN AND FILMS & OUTLINE SUPPORTED BY FILMFERNSCHIFFER BAYERN
SABINE THALAU, NADA KOSTURIN, WERNER POSSETT, SAUDITHI DJABANG, THIBAUD VALLÉE in "I UNDERSTAND YOUR DISPLEASURE" DIRECTED BY LOUIS BUCKHAUT, FRIEDRIK SEEBERGER, GÖTTFRID OLIVER BUCHHALK, GÖTTFRID JAVIER FLEMING, MERLIN MAYER, PRODUCTION DESIGNER FLORIAN UFER, MICHELLE KLEIST, COSTUME DESIGNER MARLENE JORDAN
EDITING: LEILA FATIMA KEITA, KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH, PRODUCTION DESIGNER JOHANN NURMALIYATI, SOUND DESIGNER ANDREW AMOTH, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CECILIA RUFFINI, PRODUCTION MANAGERS LUCIA HASLAUER, PRODUCTION MANAGER KATHARINA LANGEMEYER, COSIMA FORCHHEIMER, ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS RAPHAEL KOLUSE, PRODUCED BY BENJAMIN FELIX MANN, SIMON GÜRGÖZ
SCREENPLAY BY KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH, TÜNDE SAUTHER, DANIEL KUMZ, DIRECTED BY KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH

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INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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2026 - Germany - Drama - 93 min

I UNDERSTAND YOUR DISPLEASURE

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CAST

Heike Kamp	Sabine THALAU
Taja	Nada KOSTURIN
Detlev	Werner POSSELT
Selam	Sadibou DIABANG
Mina	Nigyar VELAGIC

CREW

Director	Kilian ARMANDO FRIEDRICH
Screenplay	Kilian ARMANDO FRIEDRICH Tünde SAUTIER Daniel KUNZ
Cinematography	Louis DICKHAUT Frederik SEEBERGER
Editing	Leila Fatima KEITA Kilian ARMANDO FRIEDRICH
Sound Design	Andrew MOTTL
Production Design	Michelle KLEIST Florian UFER
Costumes	Marlene JORDAN
Producers	Ben ULRICH Simon BOGOCZ Felix MANN
Produced by	WENNDANN FILM



SYNOPSIS

Heike (59) works at a cleaning company, where every day she has to handle her team's struggles, the pressure of delivering a spotless job, and the need to keep clients and boss happy. When a powerful subcontractor threatens to withdraw his support if she does not provide more work for his team, Heike faces a difficult choice.

To comply, she must sacrifice one of her own employees. As the pressure closes in, Heike must decide how far she is willing to go to meet the job's ruthless demands.

INTERVIEW WITH KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH

What were the central questions or ideas that guided you when you began developing this film?

“I Understand Your Displeasure” began with a personal experience. Between finishing school and starting university, I worked in the cleaning industry and became familiar with the world of cleaning – we cleaned swimming pools, offices, and a chocolate factory. The cleaning manager I worked with at the time deeply impressed me, and these experiences stayed with me long after our working relationship ended. Many years later, we decided to write a screenplay together, but she suddenly took her own life.

I was left shocked, wondering what role the many moral conflicts of her job may have played in the development of her mental illness. I wanted to understand the structure and rules of a job that must satisfy interests that systematically contradict one another: low prices, maximum efficiency, and humane working conditions. My intention was not to make the milieu the main focus, but to foreground the emotions and conflicts that arise in extreme situations of low cost driven markets like the cleaning sector.

The camera stays very close to Heike. Why was it important for you to stay so physically close to this character, to the point that we almost feel her breathing and exhaustion?

Through this closeness, we want to draw attention to the lived experience of our main character’s real life conditions. The handheld camera and the physical proximity try to refuse a voyeuristic distance. The audience is meant to feel as the character feels, without being given the space to step back, reflect, and “observe” her as a figure.

We chose a camera approach that is strongly focused on the individual, allowing this pressure to be felt continuously. We want to „throw” the viewer into the situations Heike experiences, rather than explain them. By placing the character at the center of the frame, it becomes impossible to avoid the intensity of the emotions, she experiences.

It was important to us to manipulate the experienced time within a scene as little as possible, so that it could be truly lived through - that was also important for the non professional actors, to be able to immerse themselves into the role. For this reason, we decided very early on to shoot each scene in a single take. However, in order to avoid an orchestrated choreography, we tried to keep the camera reactive at all times, motivated by Heike’s movements. With this, our intention was to allow the non-professional actors to unfold independently of the camera and to forget its presence.

Heike's job places her permanently between different worlds, from clients to management to cleaning staff.

What drew you to a character whose role is defined by mediation rather than clear authority?

What drew me to this character is, how broader social developments are concentrated in her role. Looking back at the 1980s is essential to understand this. When Helmut Kohl came into office with the slogan "performance must pay off again," what followed was not a fair reward for labor, but a reinterpretation of that principle in the decades after. Performance was translated into tax cuts that primarily benefited the wealthy, leaving less for those in dependent employment. Public services were cut back, the social security system was cut back, and responsibility of „easy jobs“ was increasingly outsourced.

The result is the low-wage sector in Germany: Many workers are effectively pinned to lower positions, with little chance of moving upward.

Heike's Job exists, precisely within this tension. She is a communicator, but in a fragmented working world without community. Her job demands effort and performance, but not for her own benefit. Her mediating role exposes how labor is devalued when it functions smoothly yet remains invisible. Moreover, a character defined by mediation allows for a special view of all sides: she never fully belongs to a side, and therefore stays isolated. Heike experiences the expectations of clients, the pressure from her boss, and the invisibility of the cleaning staff all at once—and carries these contradictions within herself. This constant movement between worlds makes her vulnerable but also knowledgeable - and complicit.

At first, Heike can seem guarded or difficult to read, yet the film gradually builds a strong sense of empathy for her. How did you think about shaping the audience's relationship to her over time?

At the beginning, it was important to me that Heike won't be immediately accessible. Her guardedness is a form of self-protection. In her role as a cleaning manager, Heike has to plan people like resources. When a cleaner calls in sick, it immediately becomes an organizational problem that must be solved. Often by having to clean herself. There is little space in the daily routine for personal stories, concern, or empathy. She is responsible for many people, but often encounters them briefly, in passing. Genuine conversations are not scheduled, and if they happen anyway, they quickly come into conflict with the efficiency goals. This structure also affects Heike herself. The longer she works in this system, the more she loses the sense of being seen as a person. She feels more and more isolated - burned out. This shapes how the audience connects with her. In Heike's case, I think that empathy comes through observation and repetition of her routines and the accumulation of pressure she carries.



The film has a very grounded, immediate sense of realism, both in its camera work and its focus on everyday labour. Were there particular cinematic, documentary or personal influences that shaped this approach?

My approach was shaped by a personal relation to a cleaning manager and what she told me about her daily life. I find Levinas's philosophy of the gaze particularly interesting in this regard, especially in relation to the cleaning sector, which is often structured to remain invisible. Precisely where labor is meant not to be seen, establishing a gaze can become an ethical act: it transforms anonymity into encounter and calls the viewer into responsibility. With this film, I want to create visibility and, together with our protagonist Heike, search for hope – for a moment of happiness instead of surrender. Influences include the films of the Dardenne brothers, Cesare Zavattini, Christian Mungiu, Valeska Griesebach, Ken Loach, Wojciech Starón, Ousmane Sembene, Roberto Minervini, Nora Fingscheidt or Andrea Arnold.

You chose to work with non-professional actors who share a close connection to the environments depicted in the film. How did their own experiences feed into the development of the roles and scenes?

At the beginning of the idea, there was a relationship with a cleaning manager I had known for a long time. We had intense conversations about her profession and the experiences that often affected her deeply. She was meant to play the lead role, but she unexpectedly took her own life. I fell into a hole and spent a lot of time thinking.

Eventually, I decided to continue pursuing her experiences and stories, cross-checking them with those of other cleaning managers, and I contacted cleaning companies. I also searched online for forums in the cleaning industry and there, I met Sabine, who was later to play the main role. Sabine was immediately enthusiastic about the film. The role then absorbed much of her own experience, as Sabine and I worked closely together and she also spoke with the two co-writers.

In addition, I accompanied other site managers during their working days and we spoke frequently. They were always involved in the development of the story. I documented these exchanges in writing in order to discuss them with the other two writers. Many situations emerged from real experiences that I witnessed during the research.

Together with Daniel and Tünde, our aim was to bring all of this information into a narrative structure and to create characters that could find their place within the story. At the same time, I always wanted to remain open to improvisation and to moments beyond the script.

Much of the tension comes from small negotiations and subtle shifts in power rather than overt confrontation.

How did you approach creating drama from these everyday exchanges?

Kilian, Tünde, Daniel (authors): Our characters are under immense pressure to meet targets and keep to strict schedules. It's the everyday exchanges that create the drama. We approached the scenes and characters by taking their position and perspective absolutely seriously. We wanted to show reasonably how people in the cleaning business act and make visible why they do so. We conducted extensive research through interviews, literature and fieldwork. In such a demanding working environment with strict schedules and time constraints, actions become reactions. In our film, the chain of reactions is triggered by the main character's moral belief in doing something good – helping someone to get a job.

From that point, we understood that the invisible expectations of the work environment – being nice to customers, fulfilling orders for the boss and being loyal to the colleagues – is in conflict with our character's urge to do good (create real human relations). Our aim was to select the right characters to show contradictory needs that create a systemic pressure that Heike can not satisfy.

Heike absorbs a great deal of other people's frustrations, expectations and fears. What interested you in exploring the emotional cost of this kind of invisible labour?

I was interested in how the strict hierarchy of the working world—how we organize labor—affects people emotionally, especially those positioned at the very bottom of that hierarchy, where this manifests as a lack of recognition and invisibility. What does it do to people who remain invisible when things succeed, yet have to bear the blame when things fail? Someone like Heike is among those who keep public life running. She ensures that the reproduction of labor power and social structures is maintained. We depend on those who raise children, who make sure the sick are cared for, that food actually arrives, is sorted, and can be purchased—and, crucially, and this is what the film is about, those who ensure clean and hygienic environments in spaces of work and consumption. Yet many of these people are employed within marginalized structures and are at risk of breaking under the strain.

With this film, I hope we can contribute, even in a small way, to allowing people who work in the cleaning sector to see themselves reflected on screen—and to gain a sense of self-worth, the confidence to effect change themselves, and develop their own agency.

The title, *I Understand Your Displeasure* suggests both professionalism and emotional strain. How does this tension relate to Heike's experience in the film?

This title felt appropriate because it represents a distant form of expressing empathy. It is a kind of “protective phrase,” a “defensive mode of understanding.” I find it compelling that the working world generates such distanced language in order to maintain separation while still signaling compassion.

Heike is required to understand everyone at all times, yet she cannot allow herself true empathy, because that would mean having to change the conditions of her world. This conflict leads to contradictory behavior—the behavior of a character who protects herself through distance in order to remain capable to endure.

The film resists placing Heike in a morally fixed position. How do you see her moving between responsibility, pressure and complicity?

I wanted to avoid a sense of heroism in the main character - that's why we put many situations in the script, that can show different sites of Heike, and not being just good or bad - she has accepted the system and, in her own way, tries to find a way to get through the circumstances she encounters daily. Isn't this what we all try, somehow?

Over the course of the film, Heike reveals a form of resilience that is not immediately visible. How would you describe the kind of fight she is engaged in?

Heike suffers in a personal way, because she has to endure the contradictions of efficiency and sustainable working conditions. The struggle she has to face is to realize that the work structure she is part of is shaped by decisions and interests that don't benefit her. To win this struggle and change her own situation, she needs a great deal of courage.



KILIAN ARMANDO FRIEDRICH

The director studied performing arts in Hildesheim and Madrid, followed by film directing with a focus on documentary in Munich and Mexico City. His documentary *Nomades du nucléaire* premiered at the 2023 Berlinale and won the German Short Film Award in the medium-length category. He also works as a media educator on intercultural film projects. *Ich verstehe Ihren Unmut* is his debut feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

2026 **ICH VERSTEHE IHREN UNMUT** (*I Understand Your Displeasure*) Berlinale 2026

2023 **NOMADES DU NUCLÉAIRE** (*Nuclear Nomads*); documentary, co-directed by Tizian Stromp Zargari, Berlinale 2023



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