

BFI Future Film member Nadine Vafi reports on the Future Film Recommends screening of *Mustang* (2016, dir. Deniz Gamze Ergüven)



On 17 May 2016, [Future Film Recommends](#) held a screening of Turkish coming-of-age drama *Mustang* (2016), which was followed by a discussion hosted by Corrina Antrobus and Simran Hans from [the Bechdel Test Fest](#).

Turkish female writer and director Deniz Gamze Ergüven tells the story of five young sisters, who are being forced to marry at a young age. The girls live within the conventions of their grandmother and uncle's conservative norms in a little town in Anatolia. *Mustang* beautifully reflects the girls' strong bond between each other, which is challenged by their arranged and forced marriages.

Reminiscent of *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), the film reflects innocence as well as the sexual awakening of these girls. Ostensibly as a protection from men, the girls are imprisoned in their own house because of their sexual expression in becoming women. *Mustang* illustrates, foremost with close-ups, each girl's journey throughout this traumatic fate of being forced to marry a stranger and being forced to leave sisters behind. Ergüven's film is an utterly beautiful and delicate portrayal of five young girls being deprived of their innocence and ultimately of their blossoming into young, beautiful and free women.



The post-screening discussion hosted by the Bechdel Test Fest.

Although *Mustang* is not an autobiographical film – Ergüven was born in Ankara, but moved to France when she was six months old – the story is inspired by some of Ergüven's relatives as well as her own experiences during her visits to Turkey during her youth. The film has earned a lot of critical acclaim – it was nominated for an Oscar as well as a Golden Globe and has won awards at numerous film festivals. As much praise as the film has received, it has also been criticised by some audiences and critics in Turkey. As Ergüven herself mentioned in an interview, the criticism in Turkey has ranged from accusations of presenting a false portrayal of women's lives in Turkey to threats towards her and her five Turkish leading actresses. Despite these accusations and threats, Ergüven regards her film as a political message exploring the role of women in Turkey.

The discussion afterwards reflected the positive reception of this great film. The vivid exchange among young people proved that *Mustang* confronts people with questions not only about Turkish society but also about becoming a woman, innocence versus sexuality and female empowerment – topics concerning the role of women which transcend the borders of Turkey. The film does not give a direct answer to those questions, but it confronts the audience with a fictional depiction of tragic circumstances, which can be reality for young women in today's society. *Mustang* will touch one's heart with its beautiful innocent imagery as well as with the contrast of its brutally honest narrative. It is a film well worth watching!