

ONCE UPON A TIME IN ALMERIA, a contemporary drama by Timothy Bricknell

Dawn. A street corner in suburban Almeria, far from the seafront and the tourists. A small group of anxious West African migrants, waiting for work. Amongst them Abdoulaye: 24, handsome, Senegalese.

A truck comes by- a Spanish farmer allows 10 men into the back. There's a scramble and Abdoulaye doesn't make it. The remaining men disperse.

Abdoulaye walks towards a ramshackle collection of shacks, way out of town. Ahead, an agricultural truck pulls into the shanty town to collect more day labourers. Abdoulaye breaks into a desperate run, but the truck fills up and drives off by the time he gets there. Covers him in dust. Disconsolate, Abdoulaye trudges back to a chavola, just a shack made from vegetable boxes and plastic sheeting. He turns at the sound of a vehicle approaching. A smart BMW pulls up. The driver- a middle aged Englishman in expat dark glasses and heavy tan- leans out the window. 'Get in', he says. Abdoulaye eagerly obliges.

The men drive in silence. Eventually they pull into a long drive in an opulent part of town. At the entrance to a beautiful villa, the Englishman gets out the car, nods for Abdoulaye to follow. The Englishman lights a cigar in the hallway. 'Upstairs. The bedroom on the left. The woman in the bed- bring her down, put her in the car.'

Abdoulaye goes upstairs, finds the bedroom. In the middle of a vast bed, lies a naked woman. She is dead. Abdoulaye panics... what should he do? He gingerly pulls back the bedclothes, half expecting to see blood but there is none. An empty bottle of pills on the side table. Abdoulaye wraps the woman in a sheet and heaves her over his shoulder.

Downstairs, the Englishman is waiting by the BMW, his suit is pulled aside as he holds the boot open. Abdoulaye notices a handgun in his waistband. Abdoulaye puts the body in and the two men get back in the car.

They drive once again in silence. Abdoulaye clearly nervous. The Englishman inscrutable.

Out of town, past the greenhouses into the countryside. Finally into the desert, headed toward the iconic El Faro mountain.

The BMW slows as they reach a deserted town in a dust storm. The abandoned set of many a Western movie. A church bells rings eerily, caught in the wind. As they creep along the main drag, Abdoulaye looks at the shuttered up buildings either side.

The car pulls up at a half dilapidated cemetery, part of an old set. The Englishman gets out, pulls a shovel from behind the front seat. Uses it to signal Abdoulaye out of the car before handing it to him. Abdoulaye begins to dig. The Englishman looks on, smoking- his gun clearly visible as he leans against the bonnet. The dead woman is flopped into the

hole and Abdoulaye fills the grave back in, all the while glancing between his employer, the gun, and the face of the dead woman staring up at him as her face is covered with dirt. The Englishman comes over as Abdoulaye finishes and grinds his spent cigar into the freshly dug earth. A gust of wind, another clang of the church bell. Abdoulaye suddenly whacks the Englishman with the shovel and runs towards the town.

What follows is classic Western: an exhausted man trying to hide, whilst a gunslinger stalks him along the main street of a dusty town. The Englishman fires a shot in the air. Abdoulaye breaks into a run. In his panic imagines townsfolk hiding behind their shutters, ducking behind their curtains, closing a door in his face.

Abdoulaye finds a hidden spot in a stable, waits. Quiet. He nudges out, peeks towards the car, calculating the distance. He creeps onto the veranda. Wooden boards creak under him. He's about to make a break for it when a gun pushes against his temple, the Englishman hiding around a corner. He calmly motions Abdoulaye back to the vehicle. They drive back in silence. Out of the desert, past the greenhouses, back to the shanty town.

Abdoulaye gets out. He is backing away as the Englishman lowers the window, beckons him back to the car. Abdoulaye nervously approaches. The Englishman thrusts 50 Euros into the African's hand, raises his window, drives off towards the town. Covering Abdoulaye in dust.

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"No work, no food, no nothing. All I can do is just sit here, sleep here, until I die."
(Mohammed, 26, migrant labourer, Almeria 2011)

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Statement of intention

This story, told entirely from a young Senegalese man's point of view, will offer the viewer an insight into the daily life of Europe's fastest growing work force. Migrants from all over Africa have come to Europe in their hundreds of thousands. Many forfeit their passports (if they ever had them) and life savings to those that bring them into Europe. Consequently they find themselves powerless to return home and vastly in debt. They also, invariably, find that work is not as easy to come by as they expected. Also, as Europe's economy is collapsing and their numbers increasing, they find that wages for any work they find are absurdly low. Any money they might earn is usually sent home to look after often extremely large extended families. In effect, they have become entrapped slave labour.

On the outskirts of Almeria, vast polythened plantations supply the majority of year-round fruit and vegetables to Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. These farms are mainly worked by migrant African labourers. Huge shanty towns have sprung up around the farms. These house large numbers of migrants, many many more than the farmers ever have need of. Most of these migrants are illegal and consequently without any recourse to the protections of the state. Meaning, of course, the farmers can get away with paying next to nothing.

It is the lack of power over their own destinies that I am most interested in. With no protection and piteously underpaid by those that hire them, the migrants are forced to live in extreme poverty. They are despised by the European working class who feel the influx of cheap labour is responsible for taking their jobs, exploited by the farm and industry owners, and wantonly ignored by the wealthy classes whose luxurious livelihoods are- on some level- based on their exploitation. It is an endemic disregard for human rights and dignity. We chose, almost daily, to ignore it.

The Characters

ABDOULAYE, is a young man. I imagine he sends any money he is able to earn back home to his family- a wife and three children perhaps, his mother and father, his aunt, his two sisters, their children. He carries their photograph. Their memory saves him from the depression and despondency that creeps through the shanty town like cholera.

And yet, when he writes to them, he cannot tell them how awful his life is in Europe, he is too proud to tell them he is little more than a dog in the eyes of his host nations. And he does not want them to worry that he shares a makeshift chavala with four others, sleeping on the floor, with rarely enough to eat. He longs to go home, but has neither the papers, nor the money to do so.

THE ENGLISHMAN has done a bad thing. He must dispose of the body of a young woman. Although it is not clear to the audience- just as it is not clear to Abdoulaye- how she has died, or who she was, it should be obvious that the Englishman is somehow to blame. Why else would he need her buried in the middle of nowhere? The lack of knowledge as to the details should make the whole enterprise more ominous. Is this man a killer? Might he carry on killing? Will he kill Abdoulaye? The fact that he says so little and that his eyes are obscured behind dark glasses make him all the more inscrutable. The Englishman, of course, represents the entire unknowable and decadent regime that places Abdoulaye in such a powerless position. In the end it boils down to economics: Abdoulaye, should he be offered money in return for his labour, cannot refuse, cannot complain and cannot apply his labour on his own terms on any level whatsoever. Whilst he might fear for his life, and even try to escape, the end of the story shows that the Englishman knows Abdoulaye to be so powerless that he cannot possibly fear him. It is impossible to give this story a classic climax as that would be based on a power struggle of equals. It is the ultimate insult that Abdoulaye has no choice, once he gets into the car, but to do the Englishman's bidding. And having been involved in a crime and his own life threatened, he is paid off as though he had spent the day picking tomatoes.

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Style

My aim is begin with an almost documentary realism and gradually move to a more heightened style of cinema. Their entry into the Spaghetti Western town will trigger this change. As the sun rises high in the sky, and pressure mounts on Abdoulaye, the style will become more overtly dramatic- inspired by the Westerns themselves (very subjective close ups on wide lenses etc). I imagine this will be the only section that will hold music. Also I hope to be able to use actual clips of Townsfolk hiding from many such scenes in the original movies.

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Light on ...

Timothy Bricknell Worked for many years with Anthony Minghella and for Mirage, the company Minghella co-owned with Sydney Pollack, where he ran Development and Production from their London office.

He produced the movies *Breaking and entering*, play and was an Associate Producer on *Cold mountain*. He showran and produced the HBO/BBC series *The no.1 ladies' detective agency* for which he won a Peabody Award in 2010. He also produced the bafta winning BBC2 film, *Eric & ernie* (2010), and the much praised Channel 4 mini-series *The fear* (2012). Tim is an Executive Producer of the upcoming movie the *Two faces of january*, starring Viggo Mortensen and Kirsten Dunst, and is currently producing a new mini-series for BBC1 called *From there to here* by one of the UK's best writers, Peter Bowker.

Crew members

(in the process of being selected)

