



SIN NOMBRE

Mexico/USA | 2008 | 96m | 15

Director: Cary Joji Fukunaga

Screenplay: Cary Joji Fukunaga

Producers: Amy Kaufman

Executive Producer: Gael Garcia Bernal

Cinematography: Adriano Goldman

Editor: Luis Carballar, Craig McKay

Original music: Marcello Zarvos

Leading Players: Paulina Gaitan, Edgar Flores, Kristyan Ferrer, Tenoch Huerta Mejia



If you saw a lot of migrants travelling in the hope of making new lives for themselves, would you throw fruit or stones at them? Would you see them as people who had left their homes and roots in the hope of something better in another country, risking everything in an attempt to change their luck? Or as parasitic scum who want a share of what rightfully belongs to somebody else?

Your answer may depend on such things as your political philosophy, or if you live at the start or the end of their journey. It may also reflect how much you empathise with people you don't know: whether to you they are all individuals with different stories, or a faceless, nameless mass of otherness.

You may find *Sin Nombre* takes the second option above away from you. While it details attempts to travel from Mexico and Honduras to the USA, the arguments are the same as those surrounding migration to Britain, and Cary Fukunaga's debut film gives faces to some of the faceless and names to the nameless (*sin nombre*). Does knowing the characters affect your opinion of them? When you see Sayra, Casper and Smiley rather than three nameless foreigners, can you distance yourself from what happens to them?

Even the most complimentary reviews of *Sin Nombre* use words like "painful" and "shocking". Fukunaga does not flinch from showing what his characters want to escape. The violence is bloody, savage and vicious. But not to show the constant fight for survival would be dishonest.

His research was thorough. "We spoke to police. We went to jails to meet with gang members who were part of the immigrant smuggling trade ..." (the film shows life as a member of the Mara Salvatrucha, the Central American gangs involved in trafficking US immigrants), "... we visited immigrants at train stations and yards and also at shelters, including one that is designated for immigrants who have been injured on trains - 16-year-olds who lost their legs, for example ... After seeing them, my friends decided they didn't

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want to ride the train so I ended up doing that by myself.” He also had help from two gang members in script editing.

Fukunaga found that the migrants had no illusions about a promised land: “I didn't meet any who thought that the streets were going to be paved with gold ... The journey is now one of survival, necessity, and basic economics ... You have people who can't make enough money to meet the cost of living or feed their families in their country, where the economy is falling apart.” His hope is that, having seen the film, “People will have more of an understanding of what immigrants go through to access opportunities that a lot of us are born with.”

Executive Producer Gael Garcia Bernal said, “The world - the economic situation - demands that labour comes from different places, but there's no rules, no protection, no legality for people that just want to work. It's an important issue to address and to see the ordeal that [immigrants] have to go through”.

If you see people who come to Britain looking for an escape from violence, poverty and persecution as unfortunates trying to get control of their own lives, I hope you will find echoes of your feelings in *Sin Nombre*. If however your blood boils at the audacity of these freeloaders infiltrating our borders to take advantage of us, it is probably much more important for you to see it.

BFF film note by Steve Mainwaring

Aso tonight at Bath Film Festival 2009...

9.00pm | Little Theatre | £7 / £5

Birdwatchers / La terra degli uomini rossi

Marco Bechis | Italy, Brazil | 108m | 15 | sub-titles

Pared down to the point of feeling like a documentary (perhaps by Herzog), this strikingly photographed film presents the bald injustice of the plight of Brazil's Guanari people, and the story of one group's bid to reclaim their land, without dwelling on the subtleties. The title refers to the rich tourists who ply the river, satisfied only if they spot, as well as the birdlife, typical examples of indigenous people on the riverbank. A haunting film of forceful eloquence.

and tomorrow...

Saturday 21 November | Little Theatre | £8 / £6

The Limits of Control

Jim Jarmusch | USA | 116m | 15tbc

Perhaps uncomfortable with the success of *Broken Flowers*, here Jim Jarmusch returns to the non-commercial territory in which he made his name. An exceedingly stylish and beautiful-looking riddle, laced with dry humour and an absolute-zero degree of cool. Just delicious!

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