

Io Capitano [15]

2023 Italy/Belgium/France 121 mins

UK released **4 April 2024**

Director **Matteo Garrone**

Screenplay **Matteo Garrone; Massimo Ceccherini; Massimo Gaudioso**

Cinematography **Paolo Carnera**

Music **Andrea Farri**

Cast **Seydou Sarr (Seydou); Moustapha Fall (Moussa); Issaka Sawagodo (Martin); Hichem Yacoubi (Ahmed); Doodou Sagna (Charlatan); Khady Sy (Seydou's Mother); Bamar Kane (Bouba); Cheick Oumar Diaw (Sisko)**

The case of Senegalese migrant Ibrahima Bah, who has been found guilty of gross negligence manslaughter after seeking asylum in the UK, has recently made headlines. He was chosen to steer the small boat on which some of his fellow passengers died, and feared his life would be in danger if he did not. According to news reports his conviction is unprecedented.

One of the characters in Italian filmmaker Matteo Garrone's (Gomorra, Dogman) compassionate Homeric odyssey, which follows two young men from Dakar who dream of a better life in Europe and embark on a terrifying journey, is faced with the exact same conundrum as Bah. Garrone was advised by three people who had made a similar voyage and in *Io Capitano* he threads together the real-life stories to illustrate the gruelling crossing from a migrant's perspective.

The film begins in a colourful and cosy place where we meet Seydou (Seydou Sarr) and his family, including his mother and sisters, as they plan their outfits for a dance performance. He is the only man in the house and it is clear he has pressing matters on his mind. With his cousin Moussa (Moustapha Fall) he has been saving money to make his way to Italy and the time to leave is coming soon. Money is tight, but they are getting by. Their motivations are

innocent and they sincerely believe they will have more opportunities abroad.

Garrone intentionally sets the film off as a voyage of discovery for the two boys, with uplifting music and laughter, but the reality is grim. Biting realist social commentary and magical realism sit side by side as excitement turns to dread and horrific scenes of torture and dehumanisation play out. Sequences set in a Libyan prison are particularly brutal. When it all becomes too much for the boys, Garrone turns their disassociation into surreal fantasy using folklore and the desert as beautiful backdrop.

Comparisons to Mati Diop's *Atlantics* which also took inspiration from Greek mythology and Wolof folklore can be made. She turned the story of young Senegalese men making the treacherous crossing into a supernatural tale of longing and despair and took alarming statistics into account with the foregone conclusion of death. Garrone takes a different, less radical approach by giving his characters hope and, in turn, the audience something to cling on to in terms of a will they/won't they make it narrative.

The superb casting of the two lead co-stars, who were only told the outcome of their characters storylines on the day of shooting, really buoys the film. Sarr and Fall are wonderful young actors and excel in displaying joy and fear, presenting a warming and believable brotherly dynamic. Sarr's performance in particular is so mesmerisingly credible that even as the film plays out to a familiar beat his star shines brightly.

Katherine McLaughlin, *Little White Lies*, 2 April 2024

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