

The Old Oak

UK | 2023 | 123m | 15

Director: Ken Loach

Starring: Ebla Mari, Dave Turner, Debbie

Honeywood, Trevor Fox

Hot from being nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes, *The Old Oak* is Ken Loach's (reportedly) last film, as the grand, British, social realist filmmaker prepares to call time on an illustrious career.

Treading on familiar Loach territory, the film depicts the impact of Syrian refugees being rehoused in a depressed mining village in County Durham in 2016. As the unwelcome arrivals begin to make a home for themselves and try to fit into their new community, TJ Ballantyne (Dave Turner), the kind-hearted landlord of the last remaining village pub, finds himself caught between the resentment of the locals who weren't told nor consulted about their new neighbours, and the tragic situation of the Syrians who attempt to make the best of an awful situation.

Based on a collection of real-life stories and endeavouring to give equal weight to each side, Loach and his regular screenwriting partner Paul Laverty, effectively – if at times clumsily – outline the various social, economic, and political fault lines that can contribute to the rise of racism and misunderstanding. When the unofficial spokesperson for the refugees, Yara (Ebla Mari), suggests starting a supper club to bring the two communities together, the scene is set for a clash of cultures which will ultimately expose both personal and social tragedies – a situation

that Loach firmly lays at the door of neo-conservative economic policies (the twin ghosts of Brexit and the miners' strike of 1984-85 hang over the film throughout).

Utilising non-actors whenever possible and sticking gamely to his principles, Loach's film preaches patience, kindness and camaraderie. It is a brave attempt to highlight both the desperate plight of people who – through no fault of their own – find themselves in a hostile and foreign land, and the inhabitants who themselves have been left behind by an uncaring system and negligent government.

'I hope that this isn't Loach's final film, but if it is, he has concluded with a ringing statement of faith in compassion for the oppressed,' Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*.



Excellent

Fair

Poor

What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

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Did You Know?

- A scene involving the bullying of Yara's brother at school was based on the real-life case of a Syrian boy in Huddersfield who was filmed being bullied at Almondbury Community School. The incident led to Tommy Robinson being successfully sued for libel by the boy and his family.
- Ebla Mari was teaching drama in her town in the Golan Heights and acting in occasional plays when she was approached by Loach in 2021 for the role. She received the part after a successful digital audition.

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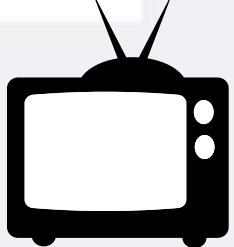
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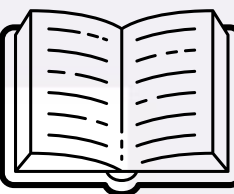


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