

Maria Delgado on *Between Two Waters*

Exploring the legacy of the legendary flamenco singer Camarón de la Isla, Isaki Lacuesta rooted *The Legend of Time* (*La Leyenda del Tiempo*) in San Fernando, Camarón's home town in southern Spain, focusing on Isra (Israel Gómez Romero), a teenager grieving for his late father. Tradition dictates that Isra can't sing flamenco while in mourning, but the ghost of Camarón – as much as that of his wayward father – hovers offer the adolescent boy and his aspirations.

Born in the year Camarón died and boasting the same head of curly hair, Isra might indeed be a Camarón in the making. He bickers with his older brother Cheito (Francisco José Gómez Romero) and is looking to impress a local girl. He wants to leave San Fernando, travel abroad and find his place in the world. Isra is growing up. Taking its title from one of Camarón's most famous songs, *The Legend of Time* works at the intersection of documentary and drama to offer a window into cross-cultural influences, family dynamics and the pull of inherited customs and rituals.

Twelve years on, Lacuesta revisits Isra in *Between Two Waters* (*Entre Dos Aguas*), which centres on the young man's attempts to win back the trust of his wife (Rocio) and three daughters (Manuela, Erika and Daniela) on release from prison for drug trafficking. Isra may have dreamt of moving on, but he stayed put in San Fernando, a city with one of the highest unemployment rates in Spain. He's twice tried to commit suicide and knowingly reflects that drugs, jail or death are the three options available to most of the community. His wife won't have him back unless he changes his ways and his two elder daughters don't recognise him. It is his less volatile brother Cheito who has managed to forge a life outside San Fernando, joining the navy and travelling the seas as Isra once hoped to do. Isra's return from prison is balanced by Cheito's return from a period battling Somalian pirates. The two men have taken very different paths.

Footage from *The Legend of Time* throws the present into sharp relief, providing a gulf between earlier aspirations and the reality of the existence that Isra now negotiates. The film has a moving humanity – from the birth of Isra's daughter, which opens the film, to his banter and battles with his brother. There is a tension

between Isra's wish to forge a different life for himself as a dutiful father and provider – changing his toddler daughter's nappy, seeking work, attending a baptism – and the pull of the past. His request for a tattoo that tells the story of his father's death, and his recognition that he's 'useless at everything except selling drugs' is one of the film's many reminders of the ominous weight of history. In this respect, *Between Two Waters* has something of the impact of a Greek tragedy, wherein primaevial forces are brought into contact with a will that is tested and tried across different scenarios.

Spain's economic crisis is never far from the film's surface and is reflected and refracted through the lens of Isra's predicament. The camera stays close to Isra, observing the texture of his skin, his patchy beard, the tattoos that adorn his torso and the desperation embodied in his body language. This proximity gives *Between Two Waters* an extraordinary sense of intimacy. The time spent watching these brothers negotiate their return home further allows the viewer to enter the rhythm of their worlds. The film's pulsating score – drawing on local sounds and fragmented voices – is provided by Kiko Veneno and Raül Refree.

Lacuesta opts for the name of a song by Paco de Lucía to provide the title of the film. *Between two waters*. The idea of betweenness is also a comment on the wider issues that the film negotiates. The small peninsula where the film is set lies in the bay of Cádiz between the Spanish mainland and Morocco. Its physical environment is one that negotiates both water and land. Bridges figure prominently in the action. Isra and Cheito fight like Cain and Abel. *Between Two Waters* moves in the delicate terrain between real life and fiction; Israel Gómez Romero hasn't spent time in prison, but Francisco José Gómez Romero is in the navy. Inspired by the real, the film gives the viewer both a portrait of time passing – parallels with Truffaut's Antoine Doinel films and Linklater's *Boyhood* can be drawn – and of a man trying to make sense of the pieces that make up his life, in search of a redemption that appears forever out of reach.

Maria Delgado is an academic, critic and curator.