

The Backway
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The Backway (2024) is a beautiful look at 'failure'. The associated harshness of the word is soothed over with the balm of a score by Mafu Conteh, and *familiarity* of being home – his sister-in-law giving him the piece of meat, the comment about his weight. The warmth of the characters and their words take over the simplicity of the scenes and settings.

It took me aback hearing Momodou say he didn't want to leave Gambia – a rare sentiment expressed in migrant movies (*wonder why*). As put by Cherno Jagne in the post-screening Q&A, not everyone leaves wanting a 'better life' – because living in the West is *not always better*. A softly-uttered indictment – it's not always a choice.

Shot in 5 days, the 15-minute film was not supposed to star Jagne himself – especially with him writing, producing *and* directing – but it is so much better for it. Momodou is quiet, sombre, evidently grappling with returning to his family, forcefully, without the markers of 'success'. When he speaks, it is assured but beseeching. Him and his brother fight, but through the choppy waters, their dad's words echo. They cry, apologize, and his brother rushes to stop the boat.

But Mo made a choice in a world that has harshly whittled them down, like so many immigrants must – bringing us to the understanding that the world is often ugly, but there are people who can find the beauty within it and show you. I'm grateful Jagne chooses to do that with us.

