



ALEX MCGREGOR



BJORN STEINBACH

DESMOND DUBE



VANESHRAN ARUMUGAM

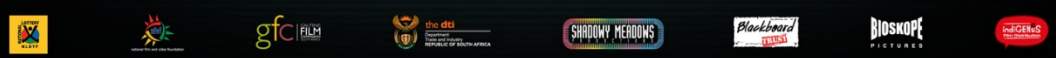


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FREEDOM FROM PUNISHMENT

# IMPUNITY

BLACKBOARD TRUST, SHADDOY MEADOWS PRODUCTIONS AND BIOSKOPE PICTURES PRESENT "IMPUNITY"  
ALEX MCGREGOR, BJORN STEINBACH, DESMOND DUBE, VANESHRAN ARUMUGAM. BASED ON THE ORIGINAL STORY "ECHO BEACH" BY TRISH MALONE.  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: ERAN TAHOV. ORIGINAL MUSIC: CHRISTOPHER LETCHER. EDITED BY: MELISSA PARRY. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: KETSO GORDHAN, DIPAK PATEL. PRODUCED BY: FLORIAN SCHATTAUER, KEN KAPLAN. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: JYOTI MISTRY.



## PRODUCTION NOTES

Shadowy Meadows Productions  
in association with Bioscope Pictures

present  
a film by  
Jyoti Mistry

# IMPUNITY

## **Starring**

Alex McGregor  
Bjorn Steinbach  
Desmond Dube  
Vaneshran Arumugam

## **Produced By**

Florian Schattauer  
Ken Kaplan

## **Written by**

Jyoti Mistry

## **Edited by**

Melissa Parry  
Khalid Shamis

## **SYNOPSIS**

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An exclusive safari lodge, the who's who of South Africa's new politically connected elite are gathering to celebrate the engagement party of ZANELE MAJOLA, a minister's daughter, to LIFA MAPUFO, a rising political star.

An open truck of delighted tourists; the morning game drive makes a grisly discovery. The mauled remains of Zanele's ravaged corpse in the pristine beauty of the African wilderness.

Two young lovers, DERREN and ECHO, waiters at the safari lodge are brought in for questioning. Their complicity in the Zanele's murder seems obvious and DINGANE FAKUDE, Special Crimes Unit, arrives to investigate the murder hoping for a swift conviction in order to protect his politically powerful masters. Aiding him in the investigation is the small town cop, NAVEED KHAN, a self-styled outcast and trained psychologist. But things are not as they appear. What looks like an open and shut case soon leads to a maze of deceit and revenge.

Delving into the alluring psychological makeup of the accused, Dingane and Naveed uncover a series of killings connected to Echo and Derren. Satisfied that he can pin the blame for Zanele's murder on the young lovers and at the same time provide Lifa with a solution to his problem, Dingane moves swiftly to wrap up the case.

Escorting the accused to Pretoria, the cops embark on a road trip across South Africa - from the verdant tropical beaches of Kwa-Zulu Natal to the farmlands of the Highveld – following the murderous trail of the love-struck young killers.

As the journey progresses, the seed of doubt is planted by Naveed, who begins to question Dingane's actions. His loyalties are tested when Dingane must confront his own complicity in granting impunity to the new elite. In a dramatic standoff which tests the limits of his partnership with Naveed, Dingane must make a choice whether to put aside his political affiliations and save the life of an innocent child, or satisfy his obligations to the puppet masters.

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

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**VIOLENT CRIME:** "Rape; Murder and Robbery, Assault, Killings over cell phones; Farm Murders, Riots at miner's strikes, political cover-ups, assault and robbery on civilians in their homes...."

Violence and the escalating brutality in South African civil society remains one of the most reported on topics internationally and, locally, feeds the imagination of many South Africans in a post-apartheid state. The sharp and marked difference under apartheid was that much of the discourse on the violence was "justified" and related to political discourse on the tensions between the oppression of the state (through the police) and the liberation struggle (anti-apartheid movements) that challenged the apartheid policies through violence.

This film is an immediate and direct response to the very visible and graphic reporting of the escalating violence in civil society in contemporary South Africa. This is not a film about the influence of the media or mediated violence nor is it a film that attempts to rationalise why South African society has increasingly conflated the boundaries between "justifiable crimes" and crimes that appear random or where the extent of the violence is unwarranted in relation to the act of civil transgression. For example: the killing of an individual for a cell phone; the mob violence of vigilante groups in township communities; the violent rape of women.

Furthermore the reports on the violence forces one to question if there is a relationship between a society that feels politically and economically frustrated, because the democratic state increasingly fails to deliver on its promises, and the very visible corruption of the political elite who live a life of prominent entitlement. This is not a film about a post-colonial state but rather about a democratic society after its historical relationship to violence (under apartheid) that has evolved with new forms of violence reflected by increasing economic poverty, unemployment, political corruption coupled with the growing fears of a white minority and the internal tensions between black factions.

In developing this script, the pathological justification of the violent crimes is of very little interest. Murder and violent crimes in South Africa have no direct, complex “backstory” of characters who have pathological and psychological reasons for why “they do bad things.” In the research, the reasons show something very different to the norm that has often been presented in mainstream (American) cinema. Serial killers, in this case are not necessarily the products of dysfunctional backgrounds. Opportunism and the fact that many people often “assume that they can get away with it” is one of the recurring themes in the research and this, to a large extent, is what informs my interest in telling this story as a South African director.

With the increased international exposure of how often and random the violence in South African society occurs, I felt the need to investigate this topic and create a story that captures the multiple layers of violence in South African society. Further I want to reflect how multi-dimensional and complex it is: from the political cover-ups to the opportunistic violence of domestic crimes and, the fact that many of these assaults and murders take place between known individuals.

Finally there is also the fact of “bystanderism” (standing by and watching without interference) that has led to the increase in public acts of violence because it is a society that feels it is neither accountable to itself nor to other individuals.

Significantly, the story is set partly as a road trip to capture the diversity of racial and ethnic profiles across the country and reflects the tension between social, racial and political violence. The landscape is a prominent feature in the film. The harsh thorny-bush landscape is juxtaposed with the lush, green foliage of the coast and suggests the way in which the landscape is implicated in the secrets of this society.

Race, remains a contentious issue in South Africa. The race dynamics are reflected through the relationship between the young white couple and the Muslim Indian Police Captain stationed at a small town and, the city Police Detective who is a Black man investigating the murder. The murder is not of a “regular civilian” who can simply be reduced to “just another crime statistic” in South Africa but the high profile nature of the case is contrasted with the other violent crimes in the story that are simply reported and “filed away”. Implicit in this story is an interrogation and questioning of how justice is served and how justice has also come to be privileged and contested in a democratic South Africa.

What unfolds over the course of this story are a series of observations, reflections and a surveillance of contemporary life in South Africa; where the rules of social and civil engagement constantly seem to be at a knife’s edge: road rage, drunken brawls, armed robbery and the fear of grievous bodily harm. It is important to note that as a South African I will not re-inscribe the hysteria that is often reported in the international press but instead aim to reflect as an insider on the multiple dimensions of the violent crime in South Africa and to show it is a way that also challenges the current political climate.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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My strength as a director is that I come from a strong background in experimental filmmaking and while the opportunities for experimental filmmaking in South African have been limited, I have had the pleasure to develop a consistent body of work that has travelled extensively.

This to me is the unique cinematic language and visual sensibility that I bring to the creative impetus of this narrative film. The tradition of the avant-garde informs to a large extent the visual and creative choices that represent the "state of mind" of the characters as they navigate the South African landscape throughout the story: the rich green coastal foliage in contrast with the dry thorny-bush and rocky hinterland.

The research that informs the visual style of this film is also about the ordinariness of these characters: they are neither psychopaths nor pathological instead the story shows how the society and the contexts they find themselves in lead to different criminal acts or violence. For instance: How the perception of saving one's personal honour and masculinity in the case of a politician and, saving a woman from a rape lead to escalated violence. The strong impulse in this story is to reflect on how ordinary people in a society end up committing extraordinary crimes because the socio-political climate facilitates it in some way. It is this sense of the ordinary; the banal that makes violence and crime most frightening in this society.

### Artistic Universe

The visual language and narrative approach is in keeping with the idiosyncrasies of contemporary life in South Africa: The constant contradictions and co-existence between modern elements in rural spaces and modern urbane living that is unburdened by the expectations of what an "African Film" should be in terms of visual style and story content. The cowherds that still dot the landscape set against the backdrop of shanty shacks with satellite-TV dishes.

It is important also that the creative freedom is about being able to offer a critique of the privileges in a black political elite and the increasing poverty of the majority.

It is further about the recognition of an existential dilemma of white subjects in South Africa who feel disenfranchised.

### Visual Approach

The visual style of the film is inspired by observational; surveying the characters as they move through space (across the country) and time (through flash-backs). This visual style also lends to the immediacy of the characters and removes the sense of stylization of the story. The ordinary, everyday activities performed by the characters are undercut by the violence and crimes that they are implicated in.

The sequence on the beach forms the nucleus of the experience for the lead characters: these narrative episodes are furtive and fictive like memory and is inspired by the paintings of the impressionist period. It is this sequence that the story returns to periodically as a search for a feeling and state of living that is outside of the “noise” created through the violence and crime in civil society in South Africa. It is a desired space “where one can feel safe”.

The linear through-line of the detectives investigating the crimes is less about a “slick investigation” rather it is about the messiness of a gritty story where resources are few in a society that is becoming increasingly accustomed to justice not being served either on time or efficiently.

In order to achieve this technically the ALEXA is the camera package with lens choices that move between the vastness of the landscape and the immediate and intimate relationships between the characters that are forced to deal with each other in close proximity and at times in very confined spaces to create the feeling of the claustrophobia.

The narrative and editing rhythm of the story is about periods of incredible slowness; ordinariness of living: Waiting or contemplating which contrasts with the sudden and unexpected crimes that take place. Often these crimes are not pre-meditated but opportunistic or emerge from attempts to correct something that is already violent itself: “Violence leading to criminal acts and other forms of violence.”

The extensive use of exteriors to capture the landscape in contrast with the claustrophobic interiors are also important creative choices to reflect on the landscape as an element that keeps or guards the historical and recent secrets of South African society.

#### Actors and performance

My style of working at a script stage was to develop the clarity of the narrative and to bring the actors into a workshop process to develop the language style for each of the characters. This ensures the authenticity of rendering of the dialogue and particularly the linguistic specificity of the different characters based on their race and ethnicity.

The actors for this project are mostly seasoned theatre trained performers who also bring a strong interpretation to the story and to the broader concept of violence that informs the film narrative.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

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### **JYOTI MISTRY** (*Director*)

Jyoti Mistry brings her unique vision as an experimental film-maker to *IMPUNITY*, her debut feature film. As an Associate Professor at University of Witwatersrand's School of Arts, she has consistently explored the avant-garde tradition through her short films which have screened at festivals internationally. Jyoti has served as artist in residence in programmes at New York University, California College of Arts, SACATAR (Brazil), and NIROX Foundation.

### **FLORIAN SCHATTAUER** (*Producer*)

Florian Schattauer studied Law in Vienna before moving to New York to produce Off Broadway theatre. He has numerous film credits as producer, including the feature films *Long Street* and *Elelwani*, which opened the Durban Film Festival 2012 and was selected for the Berlin Film Festival 2013. He co-founded Shadowy Meadows Productions and Blackboard Trust with Jyoti and has produced all of her films to date.

### **KEN KAPLAN** (*Producer*)

Ken Kaplan has produced and directed for television internationally and in South Africa. He produced the feature film *Pure Blood* and most recently, *Sleeper's Wake*, which screened in official selection at the Durban, Toronto and London BFI Film Festivals.

### **ERAN TAHOR** (*Cinematographer*)

Eran Tahor has established himself as one of South Africa's most original cinematographers with wide ranging credits from the acclaimed TV series *The Lab* to short films such as *Jesus and the Giant* and numerous commercials. His feature films include *Oil on Water* and *Cryptid*, an international genre film.

### **MELISSA PARRY** (*Editor*)

Melissa Parry has been working in the South African film industry since 2005. She graduated from AFDA Johannesburg and is currently pursuing an MA in Art History at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg. She has edited Jyoti Mistry's *I Mike What I Like* and *Bull on the Roof*. Other feature film credits include *Long Street* and *Zama Zama*. Melissa is the current chairperson of the South African Guild of Editors.

### **KHALID SHAMIS** (*Editor*)

Khalid Shamis is a South African editor and writer, known for *Imam and I* and *Afrikaaps*. He has previously worked with Jyoti Mistry on her short film *09:21:25*.

### **CHRIS LETCHER** (*Composer*)

Chris Letcher is a film composer and songwriter. Recent projects include a score for Zee Ntuli's *Hard to Get*, Carey McKenzie's *Cold Harbour* and Ntshavheni wa Luruli's *Elelwani*. He is a DMus graduate of the Royal College of Music, London and teaches music at Wits University, Johannesburg.



## ABOUT THE CAST

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### **ALEX MCGREGOR (*Echo*)**

Alex McGregor burst onto South African screens in the box office hit feature *Spud*. Her other feature film credits include: *Spud 3: Learning to Fly*, *Bad Land: Road to Fury* and *Spud 2: The Madness Continues*.

Her television credits include: *Infested! Crusoe* and *Charlie Jade*.

### **BJORN STEINBACH (*Derren*)**

Bjorn Steinbach is a New York trained actor who received his first break on *Generation Kill*, the acclaimed HBO series. He went on to appear in a number of TV movies, TV series and feature films including: *The Book of Negroes*, *Casting Me*, *The Lost Future*, *Invictus* and *Natalee Holloway*.

### **DESMOND DUBE (*Dingane*)**

Desmond Dube is one of South Africa's best loved actors and has a string of local and international features to his credit including: *Nothing for Mahala*, *Susanna van Biljon*, *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Long Run*.

His numerous television credits include: *Hopeville*, *The No1 Ladies Detective Agency* and *Joburg Blues*.

### **VANESHRAN ARUMUGAM (*Naveed*)**

Vaneshran Arumugam has appeared in the feature films *Die Wonderwerker* and *The Scorpion King*. His TV credits include recurring roles on *Leonardo* and *The Philanthropist*.

## END CREDITS

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### CAST

Echo	Alex McGregor
Derren	Bjorn Steinbach
Johannes	Dan Robbertse
Michael Kelly	Francis Chouler
Karen Kelly	Tamarin V. Vega
Zanele Majola	Londiwe Khawula
Minister Majola	Yule Masiteng
Lifa Mapufo	Simo Magwaza
Dingane Fakude	Desmond Dube
Naveed Khan	Vaneshran Arumugam
Samira Khan	Kajal Bagwandeem
Agnes	Charmaine Mtinta
Bodyguard	MK Kgoadi
Marise	Kai Levin
Marise's Father	Justin Strydom
Marise's Sister	Ozora Liebenberg
Marise's Mother	Lee-Anne Liebenberg
Drunk in Bar	Nicolas Claude

### CREW

Writer/Director	Jyoti Mistry
Producer	Florian Schattauer
Producer	Ken Kaplan
DOP	Eran Tahor
Editor	Melissa Parry
Editor	Khalid Shamis
Executive Producer	Ketso Ghordan
Executive Producer	Dipak Patel

Original Score	Christopher Letcher
Casting Director	Christa Schamberger
Production Designer	Esme Viviers
1st Assistant Director	Emile Smith
Production Manager	Allison Forget-Deyes
Continuity	Salamina Mokome
Focus Puller	Macaire Cox
Gaffer	Emmanuel Sithole
Art Director	Charlette Coetzee
Wardrobe Mistress	Martha Sibanyoni
Key Make-Up	Julene Paton
Sound Mixer	Gita Cerveira