A film by Rachid Bouchareb
Starring Brenda Blethyn & Sotigui Kouyaté

London River

2009 / DRAMA / 90'
Language: ENGLISH & FRENCH
Format: 1:85
Ratio: 16 MM COLOUR / 1.66
Sound: DOLBY SRD
Lab: GTC (FRANCE)
Locations: LONDON, BRITANNY (SAINT MALO), PACA (CAVAILLON)

Production
3B PRODUCTIONS
Co-production
ARTE, THE BUREAU, TASSILI
With the assistance of FRANCE 3, REGION PACA, ACSE, CNC

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Producer
Jean Bréhat
Co-producers
Bertrand Faivre, Matthieu de Bragonier
Associate Producer
Muriel Merlin
Line Producers
Claire Bodechon, Victoria Goddall
Post Production Supervisor
Léonie Elliot
Film Editors
Jean-Marc Tran Tan Ba, Jerome Almeras
Assistant Director
Mathieu Schiffman
Script Girl
Virginie Barbay
Sound
Philippe Lecoeur, Franck Rubio, Olivier Waizak
Music
Armund Ammar
Production Design
Jean-Marc Tran Tan Ba
Editor
Yannick Kergerat
Director of Photography
Jerome Almeras
Scriptwriters
Rachid Bouchareb, Zoe Galéron, Olivier Lecolle
Still Photographer
Roger Apajou
Production Manager (UK)
Farah Abushwesha
Production Coordinator (UK)
Valentina Brazzini
Location Manager (UK)
Caroline Barnes
Production
16 PRODUCTIONS
Co-production
ARTES, THE BUREAU, TASSILI
With the assistance of FRANCE 3, REGION PACA, ACSE, CNC
It’s the story of Ousmane and Mrs Sommers, both humble people living ordinary lives, he in France, she in the Channel Islands. He has a son – she has a daughter – they both are students in London.

On July 7th 2005, without any news of their dear children, they decide to start a journey together in search of the two teenagers. And although they come from different religious backgrounds – Ousmane is Muslim and Mrs Sommers’ Christian – they will share the same hope in finding their children alive. Setting aside their cultural differences, they will work side by side, the strength to continue the search and maintain the faith.

‘London River’ is about love, hope, vulnerability, & above all: humanity.

Interview with Rachid Bouchareb

Issue of race, nationhood, community and kinship lie at the heart of your films. You often make specific mention of making ‘mambo’ scenes…

I wouldn’t say that all my films are concerned with the subject of ‘mambo’, I could mention specific references to other cultures, but I think the issue of race is always there, it’s an underlying issue that is present in my work. It’s a way of saying that the cinema is a place where we can talk about these things, that we can discuss them, that we can express ourselves.

How were the bombings perceived in France at the time?

I think that the impact of the Madrid bombings is not the same. France has a very tight security system, it’s a way of saying that the cinema is a place where we can talk about these things, that we can discuss them, that we can express ourselves.

The subject matter is quite sensitive…

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What research did you do for the film?

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Any understanding? People don’t talk to one another…

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What is the role of faith within the film? Although the first scene shows the protagonists at prayer, in most other films religion assumes a strangely absent from the film.

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The films have a strong, documentary aesthetic, which is quite a contrast from the ‘mambo’ scenes…

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What kind of research did you do for the film?

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What was the main inspiration behind the film?

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I was very inspired by the music in the film, by the way the actors interact, by the way the story is told. It was important to me that these two people who meet are united by the same problem, which is their desire to find peace and love, and to make a better life for their children. And the story is about these two people, a man and a woman from very different backgrounds but faced with the same fears, worries, dramas.

The event itself is just starting a point. My film is less about the event itself, rather it’s about what we have to do after the event. That’s what we have to do today.

How did you go about writing the screenplay?

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It was important for me to write the script before the shooting began. I wanted to work on the story and the characters before we started filming. I wanted the story to be something from my head, something that I had conceived myself. That’s why I wrote the script, so I could work on the story and the characters before we started filming.

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I wanted to forget cinematic aesthetics entirely, to put away any obligations. That was important, because as I’ve said, I wanted to be free, I wanted the actors to be free, and I want to avoid any obligations. That was important, because as I’ve said, I wanted to be free, I wanted the actors to be free, and I want to avoid any obligations.

There’s a strong juxtaposition between the rural and the urban.

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Interview with Sotigui Kouyaté

What was it about Rachid’s screenplay that convinced you to do the film?

That’s a question that doesn’t concern Africa, but is rather about humanity. That’s it. It is about the crisis of civilization and the problems of identity. That is particularly relevant in Africa. I believe that every African has a duty towards Africa, since every African is part of Africa within him. But Africa is not necessarily identified – perhaps by itself or itself Africa. Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. Naturally, one has to talk about Africa, and this can be done in two ways. The first is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. The second is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together.

But while I am African, and always will be, what matters most is humanity. In any story, if the human being is not at its heart then it doesn’t interest me. London River is about humanity. It is a film about how we react to things, and this is what interests me. I believe that every African has a duty towards Africa, since every African is part of Africa within him. But Africa is not necessarily identified – perhaps by itself or itself Africa. Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. Naturally, one has to talk about Africa, and this can be done in two ways. The first is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. The second is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together.

One of the interesting things about Rachid’s film is that he takes an older African travelling abroad to find out what his roots are. I have seen such complicity! You might say that it was like being part of a family. And because of this, the film came almost of its own accord. It generalizes itself – but that’s humanity.

What was it about Rachid’s script choosing to work together?

It’s a film about how we react to things, and that’s what interests me. I am sure that every African carries Africa within him. But Africa is terribly misunderstood – by others and by itself. I believe that every African has a duty towards Africa, since every African is part of Africa within him. But Africa is not necessarily identified – perhaps by itself or itself Africa. Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. Naturally, one has to talk about Africa, and this can be done in two ways. The first is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together. We can’t talk of it as if it were a single entity. The second is that Africa is such a superficial term, given the diversity of nations and peoples. Africa is a million squared metres – that’s the size of Europe, America, China, and Asia all together.

Sotigui Kouyaté  — ‘LONDON RIVER’

‘Are you pleased to be reuniting with him for “LONDON RIVER”?’

‘LONDON RIVER’ to me I said yes straight away. And the instant we started shooting in London, I realised that I had never before felt such frustration. Up to that moment, there were no disagreements at all. We had all little difficulties – the language was bad, some of the local people were very angry about the filming – but the whole team, from the producer to the griots, worked together as well – so I was a new actor, and director, in France, too, I had the same feeling. This is the Rachid’s great gift to me: to allow me to film a story from my point of view. I’ve worked so many years with Rachid on set – and it was a real love story. And shooting with Rachid is rarely seen. When we were working on ‘LITTLE SENEGAL’ he would ask me to read the script and offer my thoughts and criticisms: this is very rare in a director. But Rachid has a gift in that he is able to create a great complicity on set. I’ve rarely worked with me again, in my deepest soul I wanted nothing more. Rachid has is rarely seen. When we were working on ‘LITTLE SENEGAL’ he would ask me to read the script and offer my thoughts and criticisms: this is very rare in a director. But Rachid has a gift in that he is able to create a great complicity on set. I’ve rarely worked with me again, in my deepest soul I wanted nothing more.

‘There’s an African proverb: “Take me back to yesterday”’

‘That you see and hear in the film was what came to me. It is a very, very, very, old song, which my mother, (who was one of the最伟大的Malian griots) used to sing to me as an infant, and which she continued to sing to me until the day she died. The words translates as something like:

In life, no-one knows their destiny.
Life is like that.
You can say I’ve never had that, but that doesn’t mean you won’t ever have it.

No-one knows what the future holds.
So every moment, every instant, you must live.

Throughout the filming, Rachid had advised me to improvise – he was constantly asking for my suggestions – so he worked open to itself up to. So this, the moment when the character says goodbye to another – had to be a very powerful one. In the screenplay it was written that my character tells Brenda’s son to be brave, and unless her well before me. Then we had the idea of a song, but the problem was that I was an actor, and that he wouldn’t bring anything to the scene. In the end, we decided to bring in an moment online, and the song that you see and hear in the film was what came to me. It is a very, very, very, old song, which my mother, (who was one of the great Malian griots) used to sing to me as an infant, and which she continued to sing to me until the day she died. The words translates as something like:

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‘You bring your background as a musician and a griot in “London River” the singing you comfort Jane’s mother with…’

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Interview with Brenda Blethyn

Could you tell us how you came to be involved in the project? What was it about the screenplay that first attracted you?

Actually, when Rachid asked to meet in London and I didn't know who he was but that he was a French director for a moment, I thought he was wonderful. But I wasn't sure that the dates were going to fit – and if I remember rightly it was in summer when they were speaking French on the set of the film, really, was that summer.

We got by. Sometimes it was hard, but people helped me. Brenda Blethyn

I found my character's ignorance of the Muslim faith interesting – I think many people are ignorant of others' faiths. Although it's not about that either really. I just thought, two people, coming from very different backgrounds. How did you find performing in another language?

Like your characters, you and Sotigui come from very different backgrounds. How did you find working together?

It was a hugely pleasant experience. Working with Sotigui was like spending the summer in Guernsey. The weather was fine, the weather was nice, the weather was very nice! Sometimes you get a project that ticks all the boxes, and this one, the people, the weather, the weather, the people, the weather, the people, the weather. The weather was excellent. Brenda Blethyn

...to France to shoot all the interiors and the Guernsey scenes and it was working with land, nature. It's a sleepy place, Guernsey: trying to find somewhere where you can get away from order, must be a nightmare. Also she's very self-contained, she's very reserved. In the alley, for example, when she meets the butcher, you come from order, must be a nightmare. Also she's very self-contained, she's very reserved. In the alley, for example, when she meets the butcher, she's certainly very insular; is she a racist?

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